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The Eden of Mind in Contemporary Fiction

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Thesis Submitted for the Degree
of Doctor of Philosophy in the
Faculty of Arts,
Department of English Literature

University of Glasgow

September 1981

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For the completion of this dissertation I am indebted to many people. My supervisor John A.M. Rillie provided warm and sustained encouragement. His advice seemed unfailingly to lead in the right direction. I must also thank the University of Glasgow for generous financial support during the three years of my Advanced Study Scholarship.

To the exciting exchange of ideas I shared with Jill Craig, to the joy and buoyancy of her friendship, my debt remains profound. David and Marvid Skilton helped make my years in Scotland pleasant and fulfilling, and the many kindnesses of Dorothy and Ian Dunkinson cannot go unexpressed.

I must also thank my teachers at the University of Cincinnati, who laid the foundations of my literary education. Professors Nancy Harvey, Wayne Miller, Stephen Fox and Dallas Wiebe were important mentors. I owe much to Hilary Adele for her assistance in locating source material in the United States and for a deep bond of friendship.

My husband David MacGregor exemplified the idea of scholarship and the life of the mind; his love and supportive criticism generated the ambience of intellectual endeavour which made this dissertation possible. The encouragement of my parents and of Pauline Spangler and Carl Steinbicker helped sustain me.

Finally, I must mention my appreciation to Jean Murphy for her fine efforts in typing the manuscript.

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SUMMARY

The Eden of Mind in Contemporary Fiction

Patricia Bishop

The Eden of mind means in the context of this examination the self-conscious efforts of contemporary writers to seek freedom in the pattern of words and to find it by articulating aesthetic consciousness as a supreme reality. The term *ludic fiction* is introduced as a useful unifying concept for the lexical playground of Nabokov, Barth, Fowles, Borges, Coover, and Pynchon. It postulates the re-creation of an Edenic world in the games and play of language. Chapter One offers a synopsis of the literary, philosophical, and linguistic movements directly important for ludic fiction. Chapter Two traces the origins and use of the Edenic myth and its application in the contemporary instance as a source of play and freedom. An attempt is made critically to examine and evaluate the weaknesses of play fiction, its tendency toward triviality and solipsism, and to scrutinize the opposing criticism. With a detailed textual examination of game, garden, and nature motifs, this study shows the transference of a geographic Eden to the fertility of the creative mind. Through a close analysis of *Lolita*, *Ada*, "Lost in the Funhouse," *The Sot-Weed Factor*, *The Magus*, the fictions of Borges, *The Universal Baseball Association*, *J. Henry Waugh, Prop.*, and *The Crying of Lot 49*, this thesis notes both the success and failure of ludic fiction in offering postlapsarian man the free play of mind, the force with which to transcend entropy for the aesthetic instant. The dissertation concludes that the play of ludic fiction becomes finally not hermetic but social as it adumbrates the potential for unalienated existence.

CHAPTER ONE: A SYNOPTIC OVERVIEW

Language Portraying the World as Mind

Born as men are into a world of toil and decay, they have always attempted to transcend the base limitations of their temporal existence by the creation of myths, religions, and art. The aesthetic impulse serves as a manifestation of man's power to project himself into another, imagined realm, and to capture a moment of experience for eternity, or at least for a time well beyond the immediacy of composition. Drama, fiction, and poetry obviously deal with a realm discrete from and independent of reality. Yet it is clear that this distinction makes itself felt more in some works than in others, more, for example, in the extended conceits of metaphysical poetry than in the earnest verisimilitude of Victorian fiction.

The contemporary novel explodes the illusion of fiction as reality, and the particular works examined in this study do so in a dramatic, dynamic exposition of the creative mind. The conscious self becomes the centre and the goal of the artistic quest. A pervasive solipsism and sense of triviality may result, or the work may be engaging and compelling so as to transcend the rebukes of artifice and to confront the reader with indubitable artistry and triumphant lyricism. Whatever its merits, the journey we take brings us to a scrutiny of literary art

as mind and as language. The reification or hypostatization of the external world comes as a secondary aspect.

The act of artistic creation implies a freedom of mind and emphasizes the ability of consciousness to pattern a universe. This is implicit in all fiction, but what the present study seeks to examine are those works in which this idea becomes explicit as a controlling concept. Here the union of freedom with beauty takes place through the metaphors of a paradise lost in the primal garden but retrievable as the fictive consciousness of a literary Eden.

The quest for a new world, nullified in reality, is thus transmuted into art. This dynamic can be seen operating in the medieval romances of courtly love, in Renaissance drama, in nineteenth-century American novels, and most intensely and particularly in what this study calls contemporary "ludic fiction." Contemporary ludic fiction may be defined as fiction in which the search for a new world centres on the play element of words and language, and in which a primary focus develops around the creation of images and verbal games which evoke an essential freedom otherwise denied in the postlapsarian world. In ludic fiction, author and audience play in a garden of verbal delights and the greenness never fades. Man's capacity for creative action takes him to an ever renewable Eden, existing in the mind, out of time. The contemporary fictive myth of Adamic fulfillment sets

forward images which articulate a primal play world, and the use of the word adumbrates a poetic game.

This study deals for the most part with contemporary American fiction and if we include the South American Borges in this category as a new world writer, then John Fowles remains the only European author to be considered. The concentration on American fiction parallels the relative importance of the Edenic myth for literary art in the United States, and it also relates directly to the production of the rich, innovative, and dynamic fiction which characterizes contemporary American literature. A useful starting point, the framework of a national cultural experience cannot contain the impulse of ludic fiction. The works in this study were chosen since they are broadly representative of one main current of contemporary literature. Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Coover's *The Universal Baseball Association, Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop.*, and Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* go beyond the limits of a national experience as they express universal concerns about the freedom of mind to realize itself.

John Fowles and Jorge Luis Borges immediately surface as authors for whom play and games and the verbal tricks of the magus are of dominant value. Except for the fictions of Borges, all the works in this study were written originally in English; this restriction formed a selective guide. Because of his eminence as a master

literary gamesman, it was felt Borges must be included in a study of ludic fiction. Although as fully a Slavonic writer as an American one, Vladimir Nabokov is central to this study and it would be unthinkable to view *Lolita* and *Ada* as separate from the mainstream of American ludic fiction, as they, indeed, along with *Pale Fire*, are the prototypes for it.

At the outset of this study it is necessary to examine the main currents of literature and philosophy in Europe and America since the late seventeenth century, particularly as such developments relate to future ludic fiction. We must probe epistemology and try to scrutinize changes in the way man perceived himself and the universe. The treatment will be brief relative to the complexity of its subject. The goal is an intelligent and critical synopsis, a framework of some clarity in which to consider the originality, faults or merits of contemporary ludic fiction. For our purpose we must begin with the great wave of British empiricism, with the rise of the novel, and with the prototypical gamesmanship of *Tristram Shandy*.

The development of poetry and the novel in English has led ineluctably to the abstraction of meaning in mind even as a parallel path has emerged in Western philosophy since Locke and Hume, Kant and Hegel. From a world in which all referents redounded to God as Prime Mover, with nature as an exclusively external force

separate from and uncontrolled by man, society has changed into a realm in which man perceived himself as increasingly active and powerful in moulding his own destiny. The individual *qua* individual progressed with the rise of capitalism and the beginnings of the industrial state. No longer was he a pawn in divine play. Since the individual began to see himself as a discrete entity, he turned gradually inward toward the newly realized self. The 'I' asserted itself, never to diminish.

The Lockean sensibility and Hartleian psychology which permeate *Tristram Shandy* tell us much about man's perception of himself and the human condition in the late seventeenth and in the eighteenth century. Walter Shandy is a man who individually tries to control his environment, as for instance, he anxiously attempts to arrange optimum conditions for Tristram's birth. He believes, as postulated by Hartley, that the infant human being comes into existence as a *tabula rasa*, that nature and society forge character through sensation, reflection, and experience. The Shandean man arrives at knowledge through his senses, not by means of pure metaphysical speculation. What Locke bequeathed to the eighteenth century was the dominant importance not of God, but of man creating his own universe. While maintaining belief in God (through the category of demonstration), Locke urged his fellow men to reject received or innate ideas, whatever their supposed divine

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origin. Willey has noted that "the whole force of Locke's polemic against 'innate' ideas and principles springs from his presupposition that we must each one of us build up our own being for ourselves out of our own dealings with the universe, not relying upon 'common notions' which are said to be from God, but are really the received opinions of country or party, or the sacrosanct dogmas of tradition."¹ In *Tristram Shandy* Sterne follows this dictate to seek a new relationship with the universe, as Emerson would later phrase it, and to do so he allows full indulgence in the spirit of individuality and in the relations between individuals. Royce notes, "I think I am not wrong in attributing the novel largely to that interest in analysis for which Locke stood."²

The precedents of the eighteenth-century novel lie clearly in the rise of the concept of individualism. Macpherson points out that "in the political theory and practice of the English seventeenth century," "an essential ingredient, both of the practical struggle and of the theoretical justifications, was a new belief in the value

1 Basil Willey, *The Seventeenth-Century Background: Studies in the Thought of the Age in Relation to Poetry and Religion* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1953), p. 272.

2 Josiah Royce, *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy: An Essay in The Form of Lectures*, intro. Ralph Barton Perry (New York: George Braziller, 1955), p. 81.

and the rights of the individual."³ This belief begins at least as far back as Hobbes and continues in unified form, according to Macpherson, into the nineteenth century. As far as fiction is concerned, we may see that the central value and preoccupation with the individual, whether in relation or in opposition to society, has continued to occupy a forceful role to the present. Ian Watt identifies the rise of the novel as a pursuit of truth conceived as a wholly individual matter. He argues that "the novel is the form of literature which most fully reflects this individualist and innovating reorientation."⁴ Subjective reality based on sensory perceptions, on the individual's awareness of "things themselves," as Locke explained it, rose to the forefront of any consideration of human experience. Watt concludes that "literary traditionalism was first and most fully challenged by the novel, whose primary criterion was truth to individual experience."⁵ Individual experience was an inexhaustibly fertile area to be explored and examined in detail. No longer was the model of the universal, generic human being able to captivate the imagination. In the novel the individual

3 C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 1.

4 Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1957), p. 13.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

asserted his importance.

Contemporary ludic fiction shares with *Tristram Shandy* and Lockean psychology a dominant interest in the possibilities of human consciousness. Sterne and the writers discussed at length in the following chapters delineate a fictive universe populated by concepts, fantasies, and playthings of the mind. Shklovsky argues that in *Tristram Shandy*, "The awareness of form constitutes the subject matter of the novel." "Sterne conceived of and fused the arbitrariness of literary time as material for a game..."⁶ Contemporary novelists recall Sterne in their solipsism and in the preoccupation with character (as opposed to action), and with epistemology. One critic has remarked that "*Tristram Shandy* is a mutation...of a genre more remote from the novel as readers in the nineteenth century came to understand it."⁷ Hence it would be quite futile to trace any direct lineage from Sterne's novel of 1759-67. Moreover, the parson Laurence Sterne, while confining himself to the Shandy household and the epistemology of his protagonists, does

⁶ Victor Shklovsky, "Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*: Stylistic Commentary," *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. and intro. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 35, 37.

⁷ John Butt, *The Mid-Eighteenth Century*, ed. and completed by Geoffrey Carnall, Volume VIII of *The Oxford History of English Literature*, ed. John Buxton and Norman Davis (to be completed in 13 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945-79, p. 432. (This section was actually written by Geoffrey Carnall)..

not exclude the larger world, although in this instance we are talking of "a small circle described upon the circle of the great world, of four English miles diameter, or thereabouts..."⁸

What is crucially different between Shandeanism and ludic fiction is the intrusion of the authorial voice in the latter at the expense of a larger vision, for in ludic fiction it is not characters like Uncle Toby who are continually astride their hobby-horses, it is, indeed, the authors themselves. Sterne, for all his obvious delight in toying with the reader and with diverse concepts, never approaches self-parody and never obtrudes in the manner of Nabokov in *Invitation of a Beheading* or of Barth in his entire *oeuvre*. The very youthfulness of the form itself militated against authorial solipsism; its newness was such that parody and self-parody could hardly have exceeded rather narrow limits, particularly since the reader was simply a *tyro* in his experience with the genre. The general lack of fictional sophistication and slickness predicated a freshness and freedom from self-consciousness. Yet Sterne's work partakes with ludic fiction of a fundamental concentration on the display of arcane facts, educated opinions, and literary play. As Pynchon discusses entropy,

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⁸ Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (New York: Dell, 1964), Volume One, Chapter Seven, p. 15. Future references are to this edition and will appear in parentheses.

physics, munitions plants, and rocketry in *Gravity's Rainbow*, in the manner of a conceptual sub-plot, so also does Sterne develop Lockean psychology as an integral while simultaneously independent aspect of *Tristram Shandy*. Nuttall adumbrates the extensive parody of Lockean thought. He argues, "it is the ratiocinative intelligence which, escaping from the control of instinct and sentiment, is the true principle of chaos in *Tristram Shandy*. Sterne has here triumphed over Locke merely by exaggerating an absurdity already latent in the *Essay*."⁹ Sterne is also treating us to his own display of intellectual fireworks and in this context what Sterne generates is closely akin to Schiller's concept of "Schein" or semblance as a disengagement of belief, a conscious delight in the strangeness of art as a symbolic form.¹⁰ Sterne is an active gamesman, juggling ideas as a literary magus. Sterne's capacity for gamesmanship and his virtuoso performance as a Rabelaisian entertainer generate an epistemological comedy:

⁹ A.D. Nuttall, *A Common Sky: Philosophy and the Literary Imagination* (London: Chatto and Windus for Sussex University Press, 1974), p. 53.

¹⁰ Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* developed from *Philosophy in a New Key* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 50. See also, Bernard Bosanquet, *History of Aesthetic* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., Second Edition, 1904; rpt. 1956), pp. 28-29. Bosanquet traces aesthetic semblance to Plato.

Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* and Swift's *Tale of a Tub* represent a fiction subordinated to the extravagant display of learned wit, in "flim-flam stories and pleasant fooleries," as Urquhart puts it. The vivacity of spirit that Pantagruel displayed amidst his books--"like a great fire amongst dry wood, so active it was, vigorous and indefatigable"--is an essential element in Swift's genius, and the same quality is admirably caught by Sterne. The virtuoso exploitation of Lockean psychology in *Tristram Shandy*, the adroit conjuring with recondite terms and names, the exuberant rhetoric and keen, indiscriminate appetite for projects of all kinds, marks it as an accomplished performance in the same tradition.¹¹

The engagement in games for the sake of their ludic value thus is an old tradition in the history of the English novel and indeed in literature, but it takes on an added dimension when merged with the concept of possessive individualism. The mastership of self stands as a central idea in ludic fiction since it exalts the full possibilities of man as creator of his own unique universe. The definition and reflection of man through his sensuous and ratiocinative being provides much of the framework for *Tristram Shandy*. Sterne is explicit that his is a novel framed in the mind of its narrator and a mental odyssey imbued with clear though often sardonic Lockean perspectives. In Volume Two, Chapter Two, Tristram remarks on the *Essay upon the Human Understanding*: "It is a history book, Sir, of what passes in a man's own mind" (p. 70). Sterne is as much commenting on his own endeavour as he is on Locke's *Essay* since it is wholly through the mind of Tristram that the novel unfolds. This is, technically, a brilliant method, much like the

¹¹ Butt, *op.cit.*, p. 432.

mental baseball game of Robert Coover, for it admits the possibility, indeed almost the necessity, of presenting discursive philosophical dilations, innumerable non sequiturs, amorphous ideations, and bawdy thematic occupations, all legitimately in the process of revealing what has happened to Tristram Shandy. In ostensible reversal of Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding, plot is secondary. Action gives way to individuality, subjectivity, and interrelationships of meaning. We see Sterne's "subtler revelation of character than previous novelists had reached" and realize that Walter Shandy and Uncle Toby affect each other much more than previous characters in English novels.¹² Tristram has inherited his father's thirst for intellectual excitement and his wit presents itself as a conscious aestheticism in a way similar to that of Van Veen in *Ada*.

As with the exploration of the Eden of mind, what is fundamental is the author's presentation of the subjective essence of human existence through the "digressive but progressive" musings of Tristram. With the assumption that words signify a large part of objective reality, Sterne deftly demonstrates the folly of words to define experience and the inability of philosophical and scientific hypotheses to encompass or explain the myriad variations of personal reality. As with the Trystero system in

¹² *Ibid*, p. 444.

The Crying of Lot 49, words and symbols are only valid within a particular set of accepted ideas and reference points. A bridge and a curtain mean one thing to Uncle Toby, quite another to Dr. Slop. Words suggest armaments and fortifications to Toby, regardless of their obvious (but to whom?) or more common purport, and anything can form the basis of a philosophical treatise from Walter Shandy because fortifications and philosophy are their respective orientations. In other words, objective meaning is distorted, even negated, by the idea in the mind of the individual, who with words launches alternative worlds. For Sterne, as for the later Wittgenstein, ordinary language generates epistemological complications through the individuality of use, yet neither sanctions a private language.

That there is little objective reality and no ultimate, universal meaning, except for words, ideas, and the worlds they transiently create, is a clear and essential tenet of Sterne's moral system. Humbert Humbert has only words to play with and Sterne's commentary on life's comic absurdity looks to Tristram as jester or magus and Shandeism as *modus vivendi* (merrymaking tempered by Eugenius' discreet moderation). For Sterne as for the authors of ludic fiction, life is not a sublime progression of achievement and fulfillment, nor an attainment of august goals and dreams through hard work and trying application. It is simply and supremely a pleasurable experience to be thought

about little or reflected on *ad-infinitum* but always enjoyed thoroughly. Shandeism and ludic fiction may be decried for speaking to nothing in the history of universal struggle, suffering, and sacrifice, for telling us very little about *caritas*, equality, or what it means fully to be human. Ludic fiction often reduces man to laughter and at times the role of jester supplies the human condition only with an underpinning of emptiness. For the writers of play fiction, however, literary art justifies itself as the solace of a supreme fiction, a poetic universe created by mind and endlessly available and renewable in the realm of human consciousness. We are reminded of mortality, transcience, and the irresolvable unimportance of being human. 87

As we have seen, the human individual *qua* individual was asserted by the rise of the novel and the philosophical movement away from a God-centred universe to a world with a human axis. Whereas Spinoza, for example, saw God as absolute truth and consciousness, the unity of being and substance could be located identically in the world, nature, and man, for the totality of God was a unity expressed as an immanence in the human individual. Although Spinoza expressed this oneness of God with the world in abstract terms, clearly with Spinoza and later with Locke, a philosophical leap occurred, and the fundamental progress in thought concerns the ability of the human individual to create being and substance for himself. The

individual had power to reach toward freedom through his own efforts; he was thus endowed with some power over his own destiny; God gradually receded to an auxiliary position.

Willey had discussed "the decline of religion which was undoubtedly taking place in the latter half of the [seventeenth] century."¹³ In art by the late eighteenth century due to philosophical achievements of the rationalists and early empiricists and to changes in the state, in trade, and economy, man had seized an active, self-centred role, and he had become identified with his creations and achievements. We can readily discern the heightened sense of self, the full absorption in one's own being, the quest for self-expression, self-knowledge, and freedom that marked European Romanticism. Such conceptions distinguish contemporary ludic fiction nearly as deeply as they did the poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, and Shelley. Hartman notes that "Wordsworth is the first English poet to consider and use personal experience as his sublime argument."¹⁴

The identification of God with nature, as an immanence, and the unity of man with nature posit a Spinozistic point of view pervasive even in the early poems of Wordsworth. The pantheistic realm of nature provides

¹³ Willey, *op.cit.*, p. 277.

¹⁴ Geoffrey H. Hartman, *The Unmediated Vision: An Interpretation of Wordsworth, Hopkins, Rilke, and Valéry* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 6.

a harmony which can only uplift man's spirit. God personified in nature mediates directly with the human individual and his woes. The poem "Written in very early youth" describes man as sensuous being assuaged by the calm influence of the natural world. The Hartleian perception is already articulated. As he reconciles himself with nature through sensory association, man can dwell in repose and tranquility: "Now, in this blank of things, a harmony, / Home-felt, and home-created, comes to heal / That grief for which the senses still supply / Fresh food; for only then, when memory / Is hushed, am I at rest..."¹⁵

Wordsworth locates human freedom in the "exquisite fit" of mind with Nature and the creation which their fusion might achieve. Since the poet is "a man...of more than usual organic sensibility,"¹⁶ he may assert his own individualism for all men through the creative process. Wordsworth came to see this creative impulse heightened by the inherent design and pattern of nature. Paradise for Wordsworth is actual and is to be found in the natural world. In *The Recluse* Wordsworth's view becomes explicit:

I, long before the blessed hour arrives,
Would sing in solitude the spousal verse

¹⁵ William Wordsworth, "Written in very early Youth" in *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. E. de Selincourt, Vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940; rpt. 1952), p. 3, lines 7-11.

¹⁶ William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. and intro. R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones (London: Methuen and Company Ltd., 1963), Preface of the 1800 text, p. 240.

Of this great consummation, would proclaim
 Speaking of nothing more than what we are
 How exquisitely the individual Mind,
 And the progressive powers perhaps no less
 Of the whole species to the external world
 Is fitted, and how exquisitely too,
 Theme this but little heard of among men,
 The external world is fitted to the mind
 And the creation, (by no lower name
 Can it be call'd), which they with blended might
 Accomplish: this is my great argument¹⁷

Harold Bloom calls "Tintern Abbey" "a history in little of Wordsworth's imagination," and he discusses the parallel and the "principle of reciprocity between the external world and his [Wordsworth's] own mind."¹⁸ Wordsworth finds a sense of Edenic fulfillment through the aesthetic conjunction of his imagination with nature. The poetic recollection turns man away from the toils of the postlapsarian world, back to the charms and solace of a primal natural order. Man's power and freedom lie in the capacity of his imagination to recapture Adamic experience in the Unity with nature:

If this

Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft,
 In darkness, and amid the many shapes
 Of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir
 Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,

¹⁷ William Wordsworth, *The Recluse in The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, Vol. V (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949; rpt. 1959), Appendix A, MS. B's version of fragment past line 754, p. 339.

¹⁸ Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry*, Revised and Enlarged Edition (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1971), pp. 131-32.

Have hung upon the beatings of my heart,
 How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee
 O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer thro' the woods,
 How often has my spirit turned to thee!¹⁹

Schenk notes that Jean Paul called recollection "'the only paradise from which we cannot be expelled.'" Schenk points out, however, the nature of a regressive absorption in the past which such expression may generate.²⁰ Through poetry the individual is reunited with his youth and vigour, though at the same time man is refined by the wisdom and learning of the intervening years, so that the poetic experience transcends mere physical oneness in the natural setting. This is no mere recollection of an idyllic trip; it is an assertion of the strength of mind and of poetry. The poet recalls that he is a lover of "all that we behold / From this green earth; of all the mighty world / Of eye, and ear, both what they half create / And what perceive..." (105-108). The poet gives form and design to the synthesis of man's senses and the natural universe. He carefully recollects and preserves the Edenic content of this relationship and he comes to know universal experience through his individuality and sensory awareness. Yet nature clearly is a separate entity accessible to all

19 Wordsworth, "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey" in *Lyrical Ballads*, *op.cit.*, lines 50-58, p. 113.

20 H.G. Schenk, *The Mind of the European Romantics: An Essay in Cultural History*, with a Preface by Isaiah Berlin (New York: Ungar, 1966), p. 45.

men outside the aesthetic realm and artifice never is acclaimed for its own sake. Indeed, the full arousal of the imagination is something powerful which the poet recognizes and fears. In *The Prelude* this is evident in the sections on "Crossing the Alps" (Book VI) and "Snowdon" (Book XIV, 1850). For Wordsworth art is a means to achievement but it is not actually the goal. Bloom has supplied some insight to the lines quoted above:

But why "half create"? Though the boundaries between man and Nature have wavered, Wordsworth wishes to avoid the suggestion of a total absorption of Nature into man. Man is almost totally absorbed in Nature in his childhood, and again in extreme old age... But for the mature man, outward Nature must be recognized as external. That is his freedom and his grief. His consolation is that he half creates as well as perceives "outward" Nature, for what is outward comes to him only through the gates of his own perception... Eyes and ears, the gates of perception, are not passive but selective. He cannot create the phenomena that present themselves to him; they are given. But his choice is guided by memory. Memory is the mother of poetry for Wordsworth because the poem's half of the act of creation cannot proceed without the catalyst of recollecting the poet's response to an earlier version of the outward presence of Nature...²¹

Through the application of memory and desire Wordsworth recalls the Edenic past of his childhood and youth. Wordsworth the poet becomes introspective but it is impossible to say he is self-absorbed in any sense similar to the contemporary writers of ludic fiction. As Bloom indicates, Wordsworth always demarcated self and nature as discrete entities. Nowhere does he merge the world of mind with external reality, reaching a stage of mind as the pre-

21 Bloom, *op.cit.*, pp. 136-7.

ponderant, the only, reality worth consideration.

Imagination generates fear as the poet discerns it may sever him from the solace conferred by the actual, external world. Significantly in terms of Edenic literature, the poet established a framework wherein the sensory Hartleian perspective took root as the search for mind through a re-collected synthesis of individual experience with the natural world. The voyage of *The Prelude* explicitly delineates the mind's journey to self-knowledge. Willey concludes that Wordsworth built his positive beliefs from "his own poetic experiences, and it is this which makes him representative of the modern situation--the situation in which beliefs are made out of poetry rather than poetry out of beliefs."²²

Echoing Milton's cry of the Adamic quest--"The world was all before them"--Wordsworth opens *The Prelude* with a forceful sense of the individual poet's freedom: "The earth was all before me" (line 14, 1850). He proceeds dialectically from childhood to the mature intellect. The vigour and happiness of youth are secured once again in adulthood by means of the transforming power of mind. The postlapsarian world of the mature poet achieves sublimity by destroying time through art. Onorato has commented that "in *The Prelude* we observe how the poet who recollects the child in his experiences of solitude presents at the

22 Willey, *op.cit.*, p. 295.

same time the artist's heroic determination to pursue his recollections and imaginings in solitude in order to find again the 'special' sense of himself in his experience, and perhaps to determine its meaning."²³ Consciousness becomes the controlling feature of Wordsworth's quest. Hartman points out that the poet's "theme, his focus on the individual mind, is already a sign of a 'general and gregarious advance' in human self-consciousness."²⁴ The spirit is that of the new Adam restoring himself through spots of time.²⁵ Bloom postulates that "imagination, working through memory, appropriates the visionary power and purges the dreariness originally attached to it in this instance. The power is therefore an intimation of the indestructible."²⁶

For Wordsworth the poet must restrict himself to supplying "endless combinations of forms and imagery" for "the great and universal passions of men, the most general and interesting of their occupations, and the entire world of nature before me."²⁷ Nature is the surest touchstone,

23 Richard J. Onorato, *The Character of the Poet: Wordsworth in The Prelude or Growth of a Poet's Mind* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 93.

24 Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry : 1787-1814* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, fourth printing with a new essay "Retrospect 1971," 1971), p. 50.

25 Bloom, *Visionary Company*, p. 142.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 161.

27 Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 256.

and unlike other Romantic poets and the composers of ludic fiction, Wordsworth never seeks to transcend and to escape nature in the freedom of imagination. It is visions of the earth, water, and heavens which lead the poet to "a mind sustained / By recognitions of transcendent power, / In sense conducting to ideal form / In soul of more than mortal privilege" (*Prelude*, XIV, 74-9, 1850). Imagination is almost always expressed in Edenic terms of earth and nature images, particularly water motifs, as in the famous passage in Book VI, 1850 version. Here Wordsworth links imagination to "the mighty flood of Nile / Poured from his fount of Abyssinian clouds / To fertilise the whole Egyptian plain" (VI, 614-16). The process is circular and devolves back to earth, to life in nature, the sensory experiences upon which the poet places his visions of infinity, and "the sustaining thought / Of human Being, Eternity, and God" (XIV, 204-05). Bloom writes persuasively when he speaks of Wordsworth's confinement and solace in nature and the dialectical process through which the mind reaches full consciousness as the senses abide in nature, attain imaginative transcendence, and return to earthly reality enriched with spiritual progression.

The hidden tragedy running through *The Prelude* is Wordsworth's resistance to his own imaginative emancipation.... He diffuses the secret strength of things over the widest possible landscape, in contrast to his disciple Shelley, who stands before Mont Blanc and cries, "The power is there...."

For Blake, and finally for Shelley, the Imagination's freedom from Nature is a triumph. It makes Wordsworth profoundly uneasy; he does not believe

that time and space ought to be abandoned quite so prematurely. For Blake, the matter of common perspective, the world of Primary Imagination, is hindrance, not action, but for Wordsworth it is something better than action; it is contemplation, and to see something clearly is already to have made some sense out of the diffuse and chaotic world of sensation. To mold a few of these clear things into a simple and still clearer unity is to have made imaginative sense out of sensation.²⁸

Shelley and Keats were bolder in their outright, immediate elevation of mind and art and in cultivation of sensuous experience for its own sake, which Modernist and ludic fiction more fully explore. De Quincey, Crabbe, Francis Thompson, and Coleridge sought the drug-induced world of prelapsarian freedom. Such Romantic quests find a certain parallel in the search of ludic fiction for the Edenic fulfillment of a self-created world of mind. In *Kubla Khan* Coleridge's pleasure-dome is delineated by Edenic motifs of water and sun, garden and greenery. This natural refuge reflects the subjectivity of the author's vision and clearly indicates to the reader an invented paradise explicable solely in relation to the mind's capacity for self-evolved fictions. An image such as "Caverns measureless to man" demonstrates the infinite aspect of the poet's vision. Indeed Coleridge, like the writers of ludic fiction, posits a new world of Edenic, sensuous gratification. Abrams defines the drug-generated quest in terms which explain much of ludic art as well:

trs.

28 Bloom, *Visionary Company*, p. 146.

The great gift of opium to these men was access to a new world as different from this as Mars may be; and one which ordinary mortals, hindered by terrestrial conceptions, can never, from mere description, quite comprehend. It is a world of twisted, exquisite experience, sensuous and intellectual; of "music like a perfume," and "sweet light golden with audible odors exquisite," where color is a symphony, and one can hear the walk of an insect on the ground, the bruising of a flower. Above all, in this enchanted land man is freed at last from those petty bonds upon which Kant insists: space and time. Space is amplified to such proportions that, to writer after writer, "infinity" is the only word adequate to compass it. More striking still, man escapes at last from the life of a transiency lamented by poets since time immemorial, and approaches immortality as closely as he ever can in the world; for he experiences, almost literally, eternity. This is not the abstract "eternity" of the mystic, not Vaughan's vision of "a great ring of pure and endless light," but the duration of an actual, continuous experience so long that De Quincey throws up his hands in an attempt to measure it by mundane standards.²⁹

De Quincey concentrates on his reveries under the influence of the poppy. He notes a transcendence of temporal and spatial reality, a new world of mind, "for an opium-eater is too happy to observe the notion of time." He sounds like the runner in a Borgesian labyrinth: "And sometimes, in my attempts to steer homewards,...I came suddenly upon such knotty problems of alleys, alleys without soundings, such enigmatical entries, and such sphinx's riddles of streets without obvious outlets or thoroughfares, as must baffle the audacity of porters, and

²⁹ M.H. Abrams, *The Milk of Paradise: The Effect of Opium Visions on the Works of De Quincey, Crabbe, Francis Thompson, and Coleridge* (New York: Harper and Row, Perennial Library Edition, 1970), pp. 4-5.

confound the intellects of hackney coachmen." What is true for the addict rings true for the Romantic hero and for contemporary ludic fiction: "I could almost have believed, at times, that I must be the first discoverer of some of these *terrae incognitae*, and doubted whether they had yet been laid down in the modern charts of London."³⁰ This sensuous, physical, and psychological experience transposes itself into a realm of thought, embracing the antinomies Coleridge laid out for the poet. In the otherworldliness of drug-induced dreams, visions of immortality dance upon the embers of a transient, delusive, and destructive moment. From the subjective vision emerge universally appealing and applicable images of an idealized Eden, for the visions of Coleridge and De Quincey belong for ludic writers "the secret of durable pigments," "the refuge of art," "a sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice." Such links in the corner of this vision are in part only words, language, which retrieve men from the abyss. If many words alone cannot cover the abyss, and if ludic fiction is simply the exchange of one emptiness for another trivialized barrenness.

Byron, Keats, and Shelley cultivated an aestheticism which transposed individual experience through language

³⁰ Thomas De Quincey, *The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, intro. John E. Jordan (London: Eyre, Spottiswoode, and Brockman's Library, 1972), p. 192.

into what Coleridge after his German mentors called organic unity. The intensity of poetry directly augments man's life in the world; the world is not dismissed in art, it is integrated with it. If for Coleridge "poet" and "poetry" are nearly synonymous, the poetic quest offers man a rare opportunity for holistic fulfillment, for the complete integration of all his faculties. The poetic expression "sustains and modifies the images, thoughts, and emotions of the poet's own mind," so that a universality is approached by means of the individuality of one artist. The poet's art transcends his own uniqueness as well as his own limitations: "The poet, described in an *ideal* perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity... He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) fuses, each [faculty] into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination.... This power...reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities..."³¹

Unlike the writers of contemporary ludic fiction, and many other lesser but conventional writers as well, Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley identified poetic perfection

31 S.T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. with his *Aesthetical Essays* by J. Shawcross, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907; rpt. 1969), Chapter XIV, lines 9-19.

and aesthetic achievement with man in the world and with hope for moral, political, and social change. For Shelley, "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." "They are the institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society."³² Poetry involves the search for human freedom. In his *Defence of Poetry*, Shelley posits not escapism but the integration of art in society. Holmes has argued that "the heart of his *Defence* turns on the role of poetry as a force for freedom in society."³³ Shelley is explicit in his insistence that "the most un-failing herald, companion and follower of the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution, is Poetry." While maintaining the "un-acknowledged" role of the poet as a creator of a better future reality, Shelley also delineates the Edenic function of art and of course for him these roles operate in perfect tandem:

But poetry defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions. And whether it spreads its own figured curtain, or withdraws life's dark veil from before the scene of things, it equally creates for us a being within our being. It makes us the inhabitants of a world to which the familiar world is a chaos. It reproduces the common Universe of which we are portions and percipients, and it purges from our inward sight the

³² Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," in *English Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 1098.

³³ Richard Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit* (London: Quartet Books, 1976), p. 645.

film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being. It compels us to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know. It creates anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration. It justifies [the] bold and true word of Tasso: Non merita nome di creatore, se non Iddio ed il Poeta [None merits the name of creator but God and the poet].³⁴

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Keats sees the poetic quest as Adamic and in his *Letters* proceeds to aver that "the imagination may be compared to Adam's dream--he awoke and found it truth." For him, "Men of Genius are great as certain ethereal Chemicals operating on the Mass of neutral intellect--but they have not any individuality, any determined Character."³⁵ For him the poet is an intuitive force conveying language, an impersonal agent of the word. That the poet communicates something of the prelapsarian world, of man brought to a sublime, self-created state is confirmed by Keats's notion that poetry impels man to a higher, transcendent level of mind, in essence a newly created cosmos: "Adam's dream will do here and seems to be a conviction that Imagination and its empyreal reflection is [sic] the same as human Life and its Spiritual repetition. But as I was saying--the simple imaginative Mind may have its rewards in the repetition of its own silent Working coming continually on

34 Shelley, *op.cit.*, pp. 1112, 1110.

35 John Keats, "Letter to Benjamin Bailey, November 22, 1817," in *English Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 1210.

the Spirit with a fine Suddenness."³⁶ Memory reproduces sensuous experience and with this faculty the poet transfers images and speculation into a formal medium of art. The poet knows the freedom of consciousness as it posits a new world. Keats hailed the mutability of the creative process and he saw the artist as a protean vehicle creating form through experience and language. We discern in Keats's aesthetic credo a movement away from the strong individuality of Wordsworth to an impersonal changeability in which the poet functions as conveyor of new relationships with the universe. As in Borges's tale "The Aleph," the freedom of the artistic self is to postulate many new worlds. To Richard Woodhouse Keats wrote in 1818:

As to the poetic Character itself (I mean that sort of which, if I am any thing, I am a member; that sort distinguished from the Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself--it has no self--it is everything and nothing--it has no character... It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the chameleon Poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one; because both end in speculation. A Poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence; because he has no Identity--he is continually informing and fulfilling some other Body--the Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute--the Poet has none; no identity--

36 *Ibid.*, p. 1210.

he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's
Creatures.³⁷

Keats moves away from the expression of self in poetry to the concept of the poet as a social medium who filters experience and creates new levels of reality. Stuart Sperry has demonstrated that "the literature of the Romantic age is, above most things, a literature involved with the conception of process, and among nineteenth-century poets one can account...for the centrality of Wordsworth as well as the eccentricity of Blake by the degree to which each attempted to assimilate his generation's understanding of the complexity of the mind and its operations."³⁸ Thus if for Wordsworth the self in poetry is sensation coupled with experience, memory, and reflection, for Keats the self is realized as an immanence in the poetic process of creation.

Walter Jackson Bate has called *The Fall of Hyperion* fundamentally different from the first *Hyperion* because "the interest that takes precedence over every other is the self as it tries to come to terms with reality."³⁹

37 John Keats, "Letter to Richard Woodhouse, October 27, 1818," in *English Romantic Poetry and Prose*, ed. Russell Noyes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 1221.

38 Stuart M. Sperry, *Keats the Poet* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 7-8.

39 Walter Jackson Bate, *John Keats* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 587.

Here Keats explicitly explores the Eden of mind, "A power within me of enormous ken, / To see as a god sees."⁴⁰ Bate cites the realm of Moneta as "a garden in and of the mind."⁴¹ As with Shelley, however, the conflict for Keats arises between the hermetic self-absorbed concentration of the poet and his larger role as an individual in society. Fogle points out that "*The Fall of Hyperion* portrays most searchingly the conflict between the poet and life, the demands of art and of humanitarianism, without being able entirely to resolve it."⁴² Bate cites images in this fragment which he believes "anticipate much that we associate with existentialism."⁴³ The Romantic challenge and contribution commit not just the individual self to poetic analysis but also examine the self in the context of society. The Eden of mind adumbrated especially in Keats and Shelley does not cease with a solipsistic epistemology of the poet as a god creating self and microcosm. The poet is not merely "a nightengale who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude." He is

40 John Keats, *The Fall of Hyperion - A Dream*, in *The Poetical Works of John Keats*, ed. H.W. Garrod (Oxford: Clarendon Press, Second Edition, 1958), Canto I, lines 303-04, p. 517.

41 Bate, *op.cit.*, p. 589.

42 Richard Harter Fogle, *The Imagery of Keats and Shelley, A Comparative Study* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1949), p. 202.

43 Bate, *John Keats*, p. 591.

and must be the creator of artistic consciousness and of a freedom of mind to be realized in the social world, for poets are "the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present."⁴⁴ For Shelley and for Keats, art contributes a changed man to a renewed social order and in this sense for them the Eden of mind touches ground as the rebirth of personality within the social progress and betterment of mankind.

We have seen that Romanticism was not a cult of personality divorced from larger considerations of society. The poet was conceived as part of nature, of the real world, of a larger community of individual men and women. The Realist movement more soberly surveyed the individual in response to the larger social order. The wave of Modernism which began in Europe in the late nineteenth century broke forever the sense of social order and unity, of connection and continuity, the universality of value, the congruence of mind and image. In Modernism the emphasis on process continually is reified in the thing itself, the aesthetic medium which becomes the obsessional centre of the artistic quest. Moreover, vagueness, mystery, and confusion are deliberately projected onto words and images as had not previously been attempted. The rational order of the artistic creation shattered too.

The focus on nature and on process had been

44 Shelley, "Defence of Poetry," pp. 1100, 1112.

amplified by the exponents of Naturalism and Realism, and the emphasis on self became entrenched in scientific dogmatism. Naturalism challenged the rational order not, as did Symbolism, through enigma, nuance, immediacy, and personal response, but rather through a system of mechanistic postulates that eschewed man's rational control. Similarly contrived devices, though with dissimilar causality, pervade many predictable tableaux of ludic fiction.

If Naturalism saw its fundamental principles in heredity, environment, evolution, and human biology, the movement also owed much to the philosophical positivism of Comte and Mill. Zola and others applied scientific and mechanistic models to the novel, ever mindful of Comte's "thesis that all knowledge consists in a description of the coexistence and succession of phenomena."⁴⁵ In such a system there is no room for a Byronic hero who confronts the world and triumphs. The self-involved rebel makes way for the scientific functioning of character. Mr. Gradgrind becomes representative of such literary models. As for language, it explores an explicitly empirical range of hypotheses and proofs and the process of naming. In the positivistic and utilitarian ideology of Naturalism in its crude form the individual is lost in a Benthamite

⁴⁵ John Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 16.

reckoning of the greatest good for the greatest number. We can readily perceive the antinomies between Naturalism and Romanticism for as Edmund Wilson argues, "Chateaubriand, Musset, Byron and Wordsworth ask us to be interested in themselves by virtue of the intrinsic value of the individual against the claims of society as a whole--against government, morals, conventions, academy or church."⁴⁶

Wilson elucidates the reaction against Romanticism most cogently in his discussion of the French "Parnassian" group of poets who make their first appearance in the fifties--Gautier, Leconte de Lisle, Hérédia."⁴⁷ In Browning and Tennyson he discerns, respectively, a tendency toward historical reconstruction and a preoccupation with evolutionary doctrines characteristic more of Realism than Romanticism. It is not until such late Romantics as Baudelaire and Mallarmé move so definitely beyond the boundaries of Romanticism and Realism that the epistemology of Modernism arises. Wilson avers that "the literary history of our time is to a great extent that of the development of Symbolism and of its fusion or conflict with Naturalism."⁴⁸ He cites Flaubert and Ibsen as synthesizers of Romanticism and Realism. Flaubert combines the sensuous

⁴⁶ Edmund Wilson, *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870 to 1930* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), p. 2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

images of Romanticism with a strict authorial impersonality and an almost scientific exploration of character.

"Flaubert's prose has learned to hear, see and feel with the delicate senses of Romanticism at the same time that Flaubert is disciplining and criticizing the Romantic temperament."⁴⁹ Flaubert conceived *Madame Bovary* as a precise and rationally ordered world and he dissects character with a scientific objectivity. Bre  argues that Flaubert is an organicist: "In his novel no word, no sentence, no paragraph, no single effect of style but must flow into the whole."⁵⁰ The writer himself insisted on the impersonality and god-like role of the author. Flaubert declared, "Reality, as I see it, should only be a springboard." In another letter he expatiates:

...*Madame Bovary* contains nothing from life. It is a *completely invented* story. I have put into it nothing of my feelings or of my experience. The illusion (if there is one) comes, on the contrary, from the *impersonality* of the work. It is one of my principles that you must not *write yourself*. The artist ought to be in his work like God in creation, invisible and omnipotent. He should be felt everywhere but not be seen.

Art ought, moreover, to rise above personal feelings and nervous susceptibilities! It is time to give it the precision of the physical sciences, by means of a pitiless method! Nonetheless for me the major difficulty continues to be style, form, the indefinable Beautiful *resulting from the conception*

49 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

50 Germaine Bre , "Introduction," in Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, trans. Merloyd Lawrence (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, Riverside Editions, 1969), p. xv.

itself; this is the splendor of truth, as Plato said.⁵¹

Flaubert wished to emphasize the fictionality of fiction, its conscious artifice, and the role of author as sole creator and manipulator. This modern view of fiction contrasts sharply with the Wordsworthian ideal of powerful personal emotions merging in poetry with a tranquil recollection of man in the natural world. In Flaubert's works the artist has disappeared in the preponderance of words and images standing on their own. In *Madame Bovary* such technique is used superbly, as in the famous scene in which Emma and Rodolphe sit on the second floor of the town hall discussing their love while each sentence is counterposed against the loud announcements of the agricultural prizes--"Manure," "Flemish fertilizer--flax culture--drainage--long-term leases--domestic service."⁵²

The Symbolists rejected the scientific detachment conjured by such a scene. With acute self-consciousness they explored personal sense perceptions. Disavowing the scientific, positivistic rigidities of the Parnassians, the Symbolists searched their subconscious for evocations of musical rhythms. Rimbaud viewed the poet as a seer with a certain mystical, spiritual insight. He suggested that

51 Gustave Flaubert, "On Realism," in *Documents of Modern Literary Realism*, ed. George J. Becker (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 94-95.

52 Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, trans. Merloyd Lawrence, intro. Germaine Bre  (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, Riverside Editions, 1969), pp. 124-25.

"Inventions of the unknown call for new forms."⁵³ This could be expressed with equal validity by the writers of contemporary ludic fiction, in which the Eden of mind calls for the play of words. Mallarmé stressed the musical, expressive aspects of art to reveal the poet's inner soul. Valéry merged the poet's sensuous attributes with the dialectics of Being and Non-being while at the same time holding to a classical, almost Racinian orthodoxy of form. Common ground for all the French Symbolists revolved around what Rimbaud called the notion of the unknown:

The poet makes himself a *seer* by a long, gigantic and rational derangement of all the senses. All forms of love, suffering, and madness. He searches himself. He exhausts all poisons in himself and keeps only their quintessence. Unspeakable torture where he needs all his faith, all his super-human strength, where he becomes among all men the great patient, the great criminal, the one accursed--and the supreme Scholar!-- Because he reaches the unknown! Since he cultivated his soul, rich already, more than any man! He reaches the unknown, and when, bewildered, he ends by losing the intelligence of his visions, he has seen them. Let him die as he leaps through unheard of and unnamable things: other horrible workers will come, they will begin from the horizons where the other one collapsed!⁵⁴

The Symbolists retrieved and expanded the Romantic concept of poet as central actor in his art. Unlike Flaubert who wishes to disappear from his story, Rimbaud wants to augment inner feelings, dreams, and fantasies through the sensuous images of his verse. The contrast

53 Arthur Rimbaud, *Complete Works, Selected Letters*, trans. and intro. Wallace Fowlie (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, Phoenix Books, 1966), p. 311.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 307.

between Realism and Symbolism is great. The former seeks to refine and elucidate human emotions in terms of the external world and the latter shatters the outside world for total absorption in self and soul. The concentration on raptures of self and on hermetic escape through art reminds us of contemporary ludic fiction. Nabokov's debt to Rimbaud is made explicit in *Ada*, and the poet's personal renunciation of art has strong echoes in *Lolita*. The childhood motif prevalent in ludic fiction has precedents in Rimbaud's obsession with the prelapsarian freedom of youth. What marks a vast difference between the Wordsworthian and the Nabokovian aspects of childhood is the ineluctable antinomy between the mature man and the child which both Rimbaud and Nabokov find irresolvable and without anodyne except in transient moments of aesthetic freedom. The loss of the mature man was felt personally by Rimbaud. Fowlie postulates,

With such a sentence as: *la vraie vie est absente*, we can feel that Rimbaud's illusions have been destroyed. This is the profound meaning of his most perfect poem, *Mémoire*. It is a piece composed of material realities, presented in an Eden-like innocence, which the poet has renounced. Rimbaud believed that his happiness as a child must have existed in some other age, and he was forced, but briefly, to recreate in his art that age of legends peopled by centaurs, fairies, fauns, and angels. Rimbaud's work is a cleavage between himself and a certain past that he faintly evokes.⁵⁵

55 Wallace Fowlie, "Introduction," in Wallace Fowlie, trans., *Rimbaud: Complete Works, Selected Letters* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, Phoenix Books, 1966), p. 6.

If Rimbaud's mind and art were dominated by "following the direction of an idea," rather than an exploration of its truth or falsehood, such a principle was embraced by his fellow Symbolists, and by the Modernist and post-modernist movements as well. Lewis observes that "No matter what the stimulus was for Mallarmé's attempt to create a new world for himself, this process involved an effort of self-creation where poetry was to become synonymous with life."⁵⁶ Language becomes the key to the universe and the artist is omnipotent within the realm of his works. Williams describes Mallarmé's reaction to the fallen state of postlapsarian consciousness: "The primal fall from Edenic unity resulted in a fragmentation of consciousness and consequently, of language--the tool with which consciousness interprets itself and the world. *Le Verbe*, as Mallarmé would say, is lost; all that remains are the several 'langues imparfait' of the marketplace."⁵⁷ *es/*

Kravis points to Mallarmé's concentration on the process of writing and the very personal relationship between perception and language, suggesting that for the poet

⁵⁶ Paula Gilbert Lewis, *The Aesthetics of Stéphane Mallarmé in Relation to His Public* (Rutherford, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976), p. 50.

⁵⁷ Thomas A. Williams, *Mallarmé and the Language of Mysticism* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1970), p. 35.

writing liberates reality.⁵⁸ Lewis sheds light upon this part of Mallarmé's approach in an explanation useful for ludic fiction as well:

The poet, for himself alone and within his own mind, obviously desired to be godlike. What is perhaps more important is that, throughout his life, he was desperately attempting to assert his free will in opposition to a feared doctrine of determinism. The problem of man's liberty was one that deeply concerned Mallarmé.

For if man is divine, and if he has created himself, then, as an omnipotent god, he has also created or has the ability to create his own universe and is one with it.... This redemption shall offer mankind both a horizontal movement toward the future and a vertical rise toward heaven. In addition, salvation will be a nostalgia for the past, for Mallarmé's lost religious youth, and for humanity's lost primitive paradise. But where shall such a universe exist? Mallarmé states that this ideal world will bring the absolute reign of the mind or the spirit over reality, but reality means the contemporary exterior world. The poet also emphasizes the fact that the new awareness on the part of humanity will be that of its "authentic earthly stay"... But once again, even if such a future world is earthly, it is ideal, a return to Paradise for "this civilized man of Eden," once only the poet, now all men.⁵⁹

Mallarmé perhaps more than any other Symbolist poet played with the value of words *qua* words. In "The Afternoon of a Faun," sleep is indeed "the spirit empty of words," since words and language are for the poet the keynote of life and vitality. For Mallarmé art comes

58 See Judy Kravis, *The Prose of Mallarmé: The Evolution of a Literary Language* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 175-77.

59 Lewis, *op.cit.*, p. 63.

closest to the pure form of music as Schopenhauer suggested. The Edenic myth for the Faun becomes an oneiric vision. In the dream world the faun comes near to possessing his nymphs. The world here evoked by Mallarmé reminds us of the fantasies of Humbert Humbert. Mallarmé creates an Arcadia in which the faculty of imagination is supreme. The faun remarks, "I would perpetuate these nymphs" while admitting "so I loved a dream?" The poet reiterates the faun's self-consciousness of his artifice: "if those girls whom you explain / be but an itching in your fabulous brain!" The faun acknowledges the act of creation: "o nymphs, we swell with divers MEMORIES."⁶⁰ MacIntyre comments about this poem that "the highest pleasure one can get from it will be from the musical quality of the words themselves, in their seemingly careless but so artful and willful disarrangement from syntax and their intolerance of the common decent rules of coherence."⁶¹ It was the Symbolists who elevated the power of words as the central force of the literary creation. They looked at the world through images and found an Eden of mind. Chiari concludes that "The result was pure subjectivism entirely

⁶⁰ Stéphane Mallarmé, "L'Après-midi d'un Faune," "The Afternoon of a Faun," in *French Symbolist Poetry*, trans. C.F. MacIntyre (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1958), pp. 56-63.

⁶¹ C.F. MacIntyre, trans., "Notes," in *French Symbolist Poetry* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1958), pp. 128-29.

based on language."⁶²

The influence of Edgar Allan Poe on Baudelaire and the French Symbolist movement has been widely acknowledged and discussed. Poems such as "Dream-Land," "The Raven," and "Ulalume" articulate sounds and colours and repetitions of words which were strongly echoed by the American's French devotees. The rhythmic patterns convey powerful, musical effects and the reader is conditioned to focus more on language than on meaning. Artifice, emotion, and subjectivity form prime elements of Poe's lyricism. Like Rimbaud and Mallarmé, the only Eden Poe can possess is the aesthetic paradise, "Out of SPACE--out of TIME."⁶³ In Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, and Emerson and in the works of the Symbolists, nature functions as an adjunct of mind. Baudelaire wrote in *L'Art romantique*: "'Swendenborg has taught us that...everything, form, movement, number, color, perfume, in the spiritual as in the natural world, is significant, reciprocal, conversely related, and corresponding."⁶⁴ Poe tells us that the emotional movement of

⁶² Joseph Chiari, *Symbolisme from Poe to Mallarmé: The Growth of a Myth*, Foreword by T.S. Eliot (London: Rockliff, 1956), p. 170.

⁶³ Edgar Allan Poe, "Dream-Land," in *American Poetry and Prose, New Shorter Edition*, ed. Norman Foerster and Robert Falk (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), p. 241, line 8.

⁶⁴ Charles Baudelaire, *L'Art romantique*, cited by C.M. MacIntyre, trans., in *French Symbolist Poetry* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1958), p. 119.

"The Raven" had to find correspondences in the verbal flow of the poetic language; the meaning had to be intrinsic in the rhythm, harmony, and repetition of the words. He chooses the refrain: "I resolved to diversify, and so to heighten, the effect, by adhering, in general, to the monotone of sound, while I continually varied that of thought: that is to say, I determined to produce continuously novel effects, by the variation of the application of the refrain..."⁶⁵ The concentration on auditory effect and the careful ratiocination to determine such effect remind us of Baudelaire's poem "Correspondences":

Like prolonged echoes mingling far away
in a unity tenebrous and profound,
vast as the night and as the limpid day,
perfumes, sounds, and colors correspond.⁶⁶

Among the writers examined thus far, we have observed a preponderant concentration on *process*. Process is the ratiocination of technique. Poe is meticulous in his discussion of the literary process and the effect a particular literary device will have. Poe sees himself as the translator of language. He suggests in "The Philosophy of Composition" that "The Raven" "proceeded...to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem."⁶⁷ Poe conceives the role of

⁶⁵ Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," in *American Poetry and Prose*, p. 253.

⁶⁶ Charles Baudelaire, "Correspondences," in *French Symbolist Poetry*, p. 13,

⁶⁷ Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," in *American Poetry and Prose*, p. 251.

literary artist as one of total intellectualization and control over subject matter. The author proposes a magus-like position relative to his art and to the external world. Poe's proclivity toward process and pure poetry and his preoccupation with anagrams, word games, puzzles, and mysteries, in both the poetry and the tales, call to mind the equally self-conscious methods of contemporary ludic fiction. We can see that Nabokov's involvement with Poe in *Lolita* partakes both of parody and homage. Poe stands as the first authentically American writer interested in words *qua* words and in the literary process as process. If Poe's influence was greater than his *oeuvre*, which it arguably was, it is nevertheless true that his exploration of poetry as "a dream within a dream"⁶⁸ defines the Symbolist quest for the paradise of mind in the self-referential work of art.

Far from the desolation and travail of postlapsarian life, Poe adumbrated in literature an Edenic escape through pure form. Pastoral scenes, arcadian landscapes, Edenic motifs attain a primary importance in his poetry. The ludic impulse cannot be minimized. Lois and Francis Hyslop have argued that "the tendency toward pure poetry which stems from Poe and was continued through three generations

68 Edgar Allan Poe, "A Dream Within a Dream," in *American Poetry and Prose*, p. 239, line 24.

of French poets is by no means an isolated phenomenon."⁶⁹ Yet as much as Poe embraced pure poetry, he did not question the meaning of words, that is, the ability of words to convey meaning, as Hofmannsthal would a half century later. Poe argued in *Eureka* that man must confirm his own *Godhead*. He is startled by the immensity of the outside world and equally by the vastness of the human mind and imagination. Hoffman points out that for Poe "the prime mover of the universe isn't all that different from our own soul."⁷⁰ The challenge resides in the mind's ability to translate the universe into pure form.

In contrast to Poe, Hawthorne's development as a symbolist was slow and incomplete. As Feidelson demonstrates, Hawthorne reluctantly strode the abyss between allegory and symbolism. His thought hovered between Lockean metaphysics and Romantic idealism. For Poe, mind exists and finds hypostatization in the external world. For Hawthorne nature exists and in it thought finds expression. With his commitment to the novel as "artifice," Hawthorne hoped to be exempted from the constraints of realistic narration without fully plunging into an irrational

⁶⁹ Lois and Francis E. Hyslop, Jr., trans., and ed., "Introduction" in *Baudelaire on Poe: Critical Papers* (State College, Pennsylvania: Bald Eagle Press, 1912), pp. 32-3.

⁷⁰ Daniel Hoffman, *Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company Inc., 1972), p. 243.

and possibly amoral supernaturalism. The creator of *The Scarlet Letter* could not concede an independent power for man to assume the godhead of creation. His stories reflect the belief in a natural hierarchy. "Rappaccini's Daughter" and "A Birthmark" delineate precisely the fallacy of man assuming divine powers. The only Eden for Hawthorne is one rooted and conceived in the primordial world. Any re-creation of such an Adamic experience, although probed for possibility, concludes in typical postlapsarian failure. Hawthorne remains unwilling to explore the potential spiritual chaos of process alone. Hester Prynne is confined in the stasis of concrete and well-ordered symbols. Her chance for spiritual union with Dimmesdale extends only as a remote ethereal vision. Such a distinction stands apart from Poe's concept of an emotional, sensual dream-land in an apocalyptic re-creation of Eden. The Adamic prospect for Hawthorne's characters is a light in the sky, a faint primordial glow as when Dimmesdale ascends the scaffold and a meteor flashes by. Hawthorne evokes Eden as a futile illusion, a nugatory realm for fallen man, appealing but beyond realization. Hawthorne's men and women are allegorical figures cast out from paradise and neither the power of mind nor the aesthetic process can alleviate their postlapsarian doom. The allure of the freedom of pure mind conflicts with Hawthorne's intransigent Puritan ideology, his need for allegory and chance for moral levelling. Feidelson has delineated

Hawthorne's ambivalence toward the antinomies of safe allegory and fantastic, possibly dangerous symbolism:

Yet there can be no doubt that Hawthorne experienced the attraction of inverted values--the extreme force of that anticonventional impulse which is inherent in symbolism. In the Roman Eder, he ventures to say, "the final charm is bestowed by the malaria.... For if you come hither in summer, and stroll through these glades in the golden sunset, fever walks arm in arm with you, and death awaits you at the end of the dim vista." The "piercing, thrilling, delicious kind of regret" which these thoughts arouse in him points in an obvious direction: "Aux objets repugnants nous trouvons des appas." Baudelaire stood at the end of the dim vista. If Hawthorne was unduly anxious about the freedom of symbolic meaning, it may be to his credit that he had some inkling of how far that method could go.⁷¹

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For Melville and Whitman the prospects were greatly altered. Whitman forged in *Leaves of Grass* a paean to a nation; for him the prospect of Eden could be actualized. He boldly declared, "the United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem."⁷² Whitman sang of himself although he sought to move from subjective emotion to a universality of feeling. The poet, in effect, stood as proxy for the masses: "These are really the thoughts of all men in all ages and lands, they are not original with me, / If they are not yours, as much as mine they are

⁷¹ Charles Feidelson, Jr., *Symbolism and American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 15-16.

⁷² Walt Whitman, Preface to *Leaves of Grass*, in *American Poetry and Prose*, p. 584.

nothing or next to nothing."⁷³ Most of all, Whitman
exalted men and women as self-determining creators of
their own universe. For him the American Eden sprang from
geography and culminated in mind. The Adamic point of
view began in an epistemology fed on nature and on the
potential glory of man in society. Whitman's use of
symbolism postulates the freedom of a fertile mind. *Leaves
of Grass* is, in fact, a poem about process, as Feidelson
has stated. The process of initiation in the world, of
coming to know it, equals the world itself, for the universe
is no more than the totality of man's experience in it,
according to Whitman. Symbols of birth, childhood, fruition,
sun, stars, grass, flowers delineate the power of mind to
obtain a cosmos. Whitman is bold. He has the hubris of
the first man finding the freedom of the garden and claiming
the earth for his own territory. His garden is fulfilled
in art, in the exaltation of the human spirit. Poetry
confers limitless time and space. Whitman deifies the human
individual in his creative powers. He calls for a new world
order. "A new order shall arise... Through the divinity of
themselves shall the kosmos and the new breed of poets be
interpreters of men and women and of all events and things."⁷⁴

⁷³ Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," in *Leaves of
Grass*, in *American Poetry and Prose*, p. 594, section 17,
lines 355-56.

⁷⁴ Whitman, *Preface to Leaves of Grass*, p. 587

The central place of process in Whitman's poetry foretells the direction of Modernism. Words signify the immensity and power of renewal. Whitman is the American Adam singing of himself in the new world garden. He moves dialectically from myth to geography to mind; linguistic reality posits aesthetic idealism. Men stand at the pivot of a mind-centred universe. Feidelson explains the method of "When Lilacs in the Dooryard Bloom'd" as the poet's attempt to reveal the process of mind in art: "...this poem, unlike *Lycidas* or *Adonais*, does not transmit the central figure merely by generalizing him out of all recognition. Lincoln is seldom mentioned... Instead, the focus of the poem is a presentation of the poet's mind at work in the context of Lincoln's death... the true subject of Whitman's "Lilacs" is not the Poet but the poetic process...."75

Emerson's aesthetic vision encompassed the process by which the mind absorbed and became the world. He focused not merely on man's new relationship with the universe but also on the intellectual evolution by which man actually creates the cosmos. Greatly influenced by Berkeley, Coleridge, Carlyle and Goethe, Emerson nevertheless sought a new philosophy for a new continent. His writing is dominated by a nationalistic and personal assurance that a new land conferred intrinsic symbolic reality. Emerson saw

75 Feidelson, pp. 21-22.

his country as a nation of promise in which the only vision to be created came from contemporary ideas and experience. He challenged his compatriots, "Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe?"⁷⁶ He declared, "Each age...must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding. The books of an older period will not fit this."⁷⁷ Because the mind of man posits the essential reality for the human individual, nature is little more than a symbolic reflection of man's own mind. In talking of nature and man he avers, "Its laws are the laws of his own mind."⁷⁸ We are reminded of Berkeley's dictum "that existence is 'percipi or percipere'; to exist is either to be perceived or to perceive."⁷⁹ Existence and man's consciousness of it form an inseparable unity. Sherman Paul has observed that Emerson "transplanted the dualism of the universe to the mind. 'The fundamental fact in our metaphysical constitution is,' he wrote, 'the correspondence of man to the world so that every change in that writes a record in the mind.' For him, correspondence covered all the ways by which man came

76 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*, "Introduction," in *American Poetry and Prose*, p. 311.

77 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," (Phi Beta Kappa Address at Harvard, 1837), in *American Poetry and Prose*, p. 323.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 322.

79 G.J. Warnock, *Berkeley* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex England: Penguin, 1953), p. 18.

into relation with the world *outside* of himself, transformed the world into himself, and expressed the insight of the experience in words and character."⁸⁰

Symbols were able to delineate the vastness and variability of the "Over-soul," Emerson's term for the Platonic concept of fundamental cosmic unity, and the use of symbols demonstrated that art and reality commenced and terminated in the mind and spirit of man. Matthiessen emphasizes Emerson's "acceptance of Bacon's formula for poetry, an acceptance that for once he did not contradict elsewhere but recurred to as a touchstone, as 'our best definition': 'Poetry, not finding the actual world exactly conformed to its idea of good and fair, seeks to accommodate the shows of things to the desires of the mind, and to create an ideal world better than the world of experience.'"⁸¹ Through prevalent use of symbols in his poetry and prose, Emerson confirmed his share in the profound idealism affecting America in the middle and late nineteenth century. Although Emerson did not read Hegel until late in life, the influence of Absolute Idealism was

80 Sherman Paul, *Emerson's Angle of Vision: Man and Nature in American Experience* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 4.

81 F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Experience in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941; paperback edition, 1968), p. 52.

pervasive in America during his seminal period. Emerson's thought was dialectical. Consciousness began in the soul, was enriched by nature, and returned to the self on a higher level. The poet argued that "the world--this shadow of the soul, or *other me*--lies wide around. Its attractions are the keys which unlock my thoughts and make me acquainted with myself."⁸²

Emerson's consuming interest in symbols reflected the speculative tendency of his age. William T. Harris founded the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* in 1867. It was the first publication of its kind in an Anglo-Saxon nation. Harris, an eminent educational philosopher, embraced Hegelianism. Spiller *et al* comment, "He took an active part in the Concord School of Philosophy, an informal summer group before which the lingering transcendentalists and younger philosophical minds discussed Plato, Kant, Hegel, and their disciples."⁸³ In St. Louis the Philosophical Society, largely devoted to the examination of Hegel, was a burgeoning community of scholars with energetic proponents and a wide circle of influence. The Hegelian network resisted an elitist framework and the study of German idealism and its application to American life

82 Emerson, "The American Scholar," p. 324.

83 Merle Curti, "The Literature of Ideas," *Literary History of the United States: History*, ed. Robert E. Spiller et al., 3rd ed., rev. (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 972. Hereafter cited as LHUS.

soon became something of a national pastime. Goetzman observes, "Clubs devoted to German philosophy sprang up all over the Middle West, from Milwaukee and Chicago to such unlikely places as Peoria and Davenport. These built up enormous support for the Hegelian-oriented national education policies of William Torrey Harris, when he became the first United States Commissioner of Education in 1889."⁸⁴

Passmore gives us William James's description of the Anglo-American popularity of Hegelianism: "'It is a strange thing, this resurrection of Hegel in England and here [USA] after his burial in Germany. I think his philosophy will probably have an important influence on the development of our liberal form of Christianity. It gives a quasi-metaphysical backbone which this theology has always been in need of.'"⁸⁵ Passmore adds, "'Literary philosophers' like Coleridge and Carlyle in England, Emerson in America, helped to prepare the cultivated mind for *The Secret of Hegel*--that very title points to the feeling that was abroad, the feeling that there was 'something in' Hegel."⁸⁶

84 William H. Goetzman, ed. with the assistance of Dickson Pratt, *The American Hegelians: An Intellectual Episode in the History of Western America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), p. 9.

85 John Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy*, p. 51.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Josiah Royce contributed much to the development of American idealism and his emphasis was strongly centred on epistemology. The Absolute Idealism of Royce located reality as an act of mind and saw all minds informed by one transcendental Mind. The individual realizes this Absolute only through action in society. Stovall has commented that Royce "believed that the infinite is latent in the finite, the eternal in the temporal, the ideal in the real.... To relate his philosophy more closely to the practical world, Royce went so far as to identify the Absolute with what he called 'the Spirit of Community.'"⁸⁷ In *The World and the Individual*, published in 1900, Royce sought to mediate between internal and external meaning and to show that the individual and the world form a unity; subject and object are one. The correspondence between internal and external meaning is verified as truth. Blau explains that "the completion and fulfillment of an idea means, then, that its external meaning (the 'facts' or 'existence'), corresponds to its complete internal meaning (the 'intention' or 'purpose')." ⁸⁸ Royce gave prime consideration to the internal meaning which Cunningham defines as "that which the idea aims to express and which, when expressed, may be

⁸⁷ Floyd Stovall, *American Idealism* (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1965), p. 118.

⁸⁸ Joseph L. Blau, *Men and Movements in American Philosophy* (New York: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1952), p. 214.

said to be the fulfillment of the idea." He concludes,
"In the end the purpose is inseparable from the intellectual
meaning."⁸⁹ Muirhead underscores Royce's emphasis on
knowledge over being, on epistemology over ontology.
Ontology is play, theory of knowledge alone is work.
Quoting Royce Muirhead says, "'Ontology is the child blowing
soap bubbles, philosophical analysis is the miner digging
for gold.'"⁹⁰ Royce's dialectically inclined epistemological
idealism explained the finitude of man by comparison with
the Absolute, suggesting that the very limitation of man
contains within it an antinomical resolution, that is,
in infinity. Royce declared, "Every being who is rationally
conscious of time, is, by that very fact, living in part
out of the world of time. For what we know we transcend."
For Royce consciousness marked the progression toward
freedom. He continued, "To live in time by virtue of
one's physical nature, but out of time by virtue of one's
very consciousness of time itself, is to share in the
eternal freedom, and to be a moral agent."⁹¹

⁸⁹ G. Watts Cunningham, *The Idealistic Argument in
Recent British and American Philosophy* (New York: The
Century Company, 1933), p. 264.

⁹⁰ Josiah Royce quoted by John H. Muirhead, *The Platonic
Tradition in Anglo-Saxon Philosophy: Studies in the History
of Idealism in England and America* (London: George Allen
and Unwin Ltd., 1931), p. 354.

⁹¹ Josiah Royce, *Selections from Studies of
Good and Evil* in Paul Russell Anderson and Max Harold Fisch,
*Philosophy in America: From the Puritans to James, With
Representative Selections* (New York: Appleton-Century-
Co., Inc. 1939), p. 518.

As man partakes in the infinitude of God, or the Absolute, he shares in an infinite process. Magill has argued, "*The World and the Individual* comes to be recognizable as a revolutionary manifesto directed to the human spirit."⁹² It is notable that Royce's philosophy reflected the fervour of the age in embracing and explaining the expansive potential of the individual, as well as justifying the political expansion of the American nation. Goetzmann has characterized American Hegelian thinking as "a kind of Manifest Destiny of the mind, aiming always toward the formation of the greater community."⁹³ The sagacious spirit of freedom derived through consciousness of our heritage receives in Royce the imprint of American individualism and optimism. Royce stakes out the territory of the mind as the birthright of the human individual in society. A quotation from Volume I of *The World and the Individual*, cited by Cunningham, may help to clarify and summarize Royce's understanding of human freedom:

Nothing whatever besides yourself determines either causally or otherwise just what constitutes your individuality, for you are just this unique and elsewhere unexampled expression of the divine meaning. And here and now your individuality in your act is your freedom. This your freedom is your unique

⁹² Frank Magill, ed., *Masterpieces of World Philosophy in Summary Form* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), p. 744.

⁹³ Goetzman, p. 16.

possession. Nowhere else in the universe is there what here expresses itself in your conscious being. And this is true of you, not in spite of the unity of the divine consciousness, but just because of the very uniqueness of the whole divine life. For all is divine, all expresses meaning. All meaning is uniquely expressed. Nothing is vainly repeated; you, too, then, as individual are unique. And (here is the central fact) just in so far as you consciously will and choose, you then and there in so far know what this unique meaning of yours is. Therefore you are in action Free and Individual, just because the unity of the divine life when taken together with the uniqueness of this life, implies in every finite being just such essential originality of meaning as that of which you are conscious. Arise, then, freeman, stand forth in thy world. It is God's world. It is also thine.⁹⁴

The strenuous optimism of Royce, his confidence in the power of consciousness to reach its object, reflected and contributed to the spirit of the age. This of course was an important influence in literature as well. Absolute Idealism reinforced the Edenic concept in fiction for it placed the power of existence squarely within the ken and control of the social individual. The quintessentially Hegelian phrase "To know is to transcend" reverberated in the work of Hart Crane and Wallace Stevens in the 1930's. It is hard to define the influence of idealism on the mind of America at the threshold of the new century as a response to the bold growth of capitalism and industrialization: "Here was a philosophy which restored to the individual the purpose and dignity of which Darwinism and the new interdependent society of urban industrialism seemed to so

⁹⁴ Josiah Royce cited by Cunningham, pp. 230-31.

many to rob him. Here, too, was a system of thought serviceable to an older individualistic democracy which was being threatened by new aggregates of mass power..."⁹⁵ These thoughts were voiced by the eminent American sociologist Lester Frank Ward, who argued in *The Psychic Factors of Civilization*, published in 1893, that "within a monistic and activistic universe the human mind has been and can be in the future in even larger degree, a creative force for the democracy and humanitarianism without which only a handful of individuals can truly live."⁹⁶ Thorstein Veblen attacked the shibboleths and behaviour of the business community while adhering to a populist brand of individualism, but it was James Edwin Creighton who carried the tenets of the British idealists Bradley and Bosanquet into the first decades of the twentieth century in America.

Creighton's version of speculative idealism embraced nature and mind as complementary. That is, the natural world and social relations among individuals were external, discrete entities reinforcing the power of mind but also existing independently. Creighton emphasized, "We need also a material system of things, an order to which we have to submit our intelligence and our will..."⁹⁷ Cunningham summarizes Creighton's notion of Absolute Mind as he underscores the place of experience in it: "In short, we must

⁹⁵ Kerrie Curti, "The Literature of Ideas," 1903, p. 971

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 981

⁹⁷ Creighton cited by Cunningham, p. 300.

be the fulfillment and completion of the deeper demands of experience as the complementary relationship of self, other selves, and nature; it cannot therefore negate any of these coordinate moments of experience."⁹⁸

The central importance of experience was taken up by Charles Peirce and William James in the theory of pragmatism. James called pragmatism "'a new name for some old ways of thinking,'"⁹⁹ acknowledging his indebtedness to John Stuart Mill and the tradition of British empiricism. Peirce adumbrated pragmatism as follows: "'Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object.'"¹⁰⁰ Anderson and Fisch delineate a prime difference between Peirce and James to be the latter's concentration on truth as well as meaning. "James's theory of truth was individualistic, and it was nominalistic in tendency." As against traditional empiricism, however, "James's empiricism allowed for a certain free play in the projection of ideas and in the choice of some for belief and action at the believer's and actor's risk."¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Cunningham, p. 301.

⁹⁹ James quoted by Passmore, p. 109.

¹⁰⁰ Peirce quoted by Passmore, p. 109.

¹⁰¹ Paul Russell Anderson and Max Harold Fisch, *Philosophy in America: From the Puritans to James, With Representative Selections* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1939), pp. 523, 522.

Although empiricism, broadly defined, has forged the strongest aspects of British philosophy, Absolute Idealism held a certain sway after the publication of J.H. Stirling's *The Secret of Hegel* in 1865 until the influence of Bradley and Bosanquet diminished in the early part of this century. Hegelianism marked a significant deviation from the empirical pattern of the British school. After the reign of Absolute Idealism in Britain, the movement in philosophy evolved toward a concern for linguistic processes and a preoccupation with the antinomies in words and language. G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell demarcated the terms of the disavowal of Idealism. As Passmore points out, "Moore led that attack upon Idealism, particularly the Idealism of Bradley, which first won for Moore and Russell their reputation as philosophers."¹⁰² Moore established a philosophical basis for concreteness of thought and simplicity of language, for the common-sense approach, as he phrased it. He questioned automatic assumptions, such as the existence of time or material objects, and moreover, he deconstructed the very investigative structure of the typical questions philosophers are trained to ask. He thought philosophers should examine the terms of their initial reference and the framework of the language employed. Moore emphasized "the *truth* of certain very common propositions,"

¹⁰² Passmore, p. 201.

while eschewing any explicit theory of ordinary language.¹⁰³ The clarification of language was a central feature of Moore's writings, which strongly pushed his successors in the direction of linguistic philosophy, as Passmore tells us.¹⁰⁴

In the exploration of logical atomism, Russell wanted to assert the most basic elements which constitute "a logically perfect language." Both he and Wittgenstein in his early writings adumbrated words as the basic unit of meaning and they posited the irreducible meaning or atomism of the simplest verbal expressions. Warnock states that Wittgenstein, Ramsey, Wisdom, and Russell "all shared a single ambition--the ambition, that is, of establishing the thesis that there were in reality only atomic facts, and in language only atomic and molecular propositions. These 'atoms', linguistic or factual, were the final, or the nearest approach to the final, 'residue in analysis'. They laid bare the essential character of language and of the world."¹⁰⁵ The prevalent interest in the word and in the structure of language controlled the focus of much philosophical and fictional writing, as would later be manifested in ludic fiction, which seeks to merge the word and the world.

¹⁰³ G.J. Warnock, *English Philosophy since 1800* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 36.

¹⁰⁴ Passmore, p. 213.

¹⁰⁵ Warnock, p. 36.

Russell and Wittgenstein later recanted the glibness with which they associated meaning and the word. No one could describe exactly what constituted a logical atom of language. Words were the only certainty and even they were uncertain. The act of probing meaning from the verbal unit did, however, reaffirm the much more general twentieth-century push toward an analysis of language as central to the comprehension of human consciousness and action. Postulating "the pluralism which regards the world, both that of existents and that of entities, as composed of an infinite number of mutually independent entities,"¹⁰⁶ Russell projected being in association with the linguistic presence.

In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein took the external, descriptive meaning of words to be reflective of the world, and he identified language by the metaphor of the picture. At this point his writings articulate a concreteness based on the concept of framing a world in words. To discuss language it is necessary to bare it to the core of signification since the ontological reality of words depends on the atomic facts we assert with their use. Stegmüller points out that Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* "saw the descriptive function of language as its cardinal function to which all the other functions could be reduced, whereas later he rejected the notion of a single chief function of

106 Passmore, pp. 225-26.

language."¹⁰⁷ In his seminal study, Finch argues that "the basic change between Wittgenstein's earlier and later philosophies was the giving up of the idea of language as an exact calculus with a world necessarily of a corresponding character."¹⁰⁸

In his later writings Wittgenstein dismissed the philosophy of the *Tractatus* as meaningless. Many commentators have nevertheless interpreted *Philosophical Investigations* more as a continuation of the *Tractatus* than as a complete break. Feyerabend, for example, argues "that the *Investigations* basically contain an application of the main ideas of the *Tractatus* to several concrete problems, the only difference being the use of language-games instead of the language of the natural sciences which formed the theoretical background of the *Tractatus*."¹⁰⁹ For the scrutiny of contemporary ludic fiction, Wittgenstein's work retains particular importance in the analysis of language-games and of playing with structure, although

¹⁰⁷ Wolfgang Stegmüller, *Main Currents in Contemporary German, British and American Philosophy* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 412

¹⁰⁸ Henry LeRoy Finch, *Wittgenstein-The Later Philosophy: An Exposition of the Philosophical Investigations* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1977), p.11.

¹⁰⁹ Paul Feyerabend, "Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*" in *Modern Studies in Philosophy: A Collection of Critical Essays, Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations*, ed. George Pitcher (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., Papermac, 1966; rpt. 1970), p. 148.

his later work clashed with the received opinions of others dealing with language. Ogden and Richards' affective interpretation of literature based on scientific method contrasted greatly with the writings of their contemporary Wittgenstein. As particularly against the later Wittgenstein, *The Meaning of Meaning* for all its ambiguities stands out as a polemic for the significance of referential and correlative relationships in language. In Ogden and Richards' affective theory, "'Meaning' evidently is a symbol some of whose elucidations must rest upon psychology..." For these theorists "the grammatical alternative" "tends very greatly to confuse the discussion."¹¹⁰

In *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein, however, demonstrates that words *qua* words have no meaning, psychological or otherwise. The specific manner or context in which words are brought forward in ordinary language conditions the meaning and cognitive variation of statements and generates the distinguishing element. The language-games announce the frame of reference, the ostensive definition or use value, setting up both a syntactical and epistemological structure. He has argued that "Language is a labyrinth of paths. You approach from *one* side and know

¹¹⁰ C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of The Influence of Language upon Thought and of The Science of Symbolism*, With Supplementary Essays by B. Malinowski and F.G. Crookshank (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1956), p. 186.

your way about; you approach the same place from another side and no longer know your way about."¹¹¹ Language and play join together in the invention and execution of the fictional world in which use-value is eschewed for the ludic element: "To invent a language could mean to invent an instrument for a particular purpose on the basis of the laws of nature (or consistently with them); but it also has the other sense, analogous to that in which we speak of the invention of a game." Wittgenstein concludes, "Here I am stating something about the grammar of the word 'language', by connecting it with the grammar of the word 'invent'" (section 492, p. 137^e). Writers must define their terms explicitly. Otherwise novelists will not only create their own precursors but will also compel infinitely different subjective readings of any one work of art. Richardson emphasizes that "in philosophy Wittgenstein maintains that we are not to look for scientific theories. A word simply has the meaning which is given by the user, and so there can be no scientific investigation into what it 'really means!'"¹¹² If language is a convention determined by social rules, then the readers of fiction are

¹¹¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 2nd ed., trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), p. 82^e. Subsequent references are to this edition and will appear in parentheses.

¹¹² John G. Richardson, *The Grammar of Fiction: An Interpretation of Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Language* (New York: Schocken Press, 1976), p. 31.

in a sense also its creators. Wittgenstein exists at the centre of the postmodernist struggle. The development in his thought illuminates a similar pattern in the progression from Modernism to literary postmodernism.

It is against such a philosophical backdrop that twentieth-century American literature, European Modernism, and ludic fiction evolve. Early in the century, the Imagist movement in poetry was a radical departure. Here the poet focused on the sensuous import of words in much the same way that contemporary philosophers believed in words as logical atoms of language. The Americans who joined the anti-romanticist T.E. Hulme in London affirmed with Yeats the power of the carefully-articulated, well-controlled word as image. The new style was a sparse one in which no word was to be supererogatory. Hulme urged, "'Poetry is no more nor less than a mosaic of words, so great exactness is required for each one.'"¹¹³ With the onset of World War I and the death of Henry James, one age closed as another more turbulent one began. James stood at the threshold of Modernism. Pound pushed open the door. Pound made himself the spokesman for the Imagist movement and was associated with Hilda Doolittle and Amy Lowell. Harriet Moore's Chicago magazine *Poetry* gave the Imagist poets exposure, and in turn they rescued the journal. Ezra Pound became its European correspondent. The new emphasis on the poem

¹¹³ Quoted by Willard Thorp, "The 'New' Poetry," *LHUS*, p. 1184.

as words, as sensuous objects, may be summarized by Archibald MacLeish's statement that "the purpose of the expression of emotion in a poem is not to recreate the poet's emotion in some one else.... The poem itself is a finality, an end, a creation."¹¹⁴ In "Ars Poetica" MacLeish issued his famous dictum, "A poem should not mean / But be."¹¹⁵ This credo articulated the beliefs of the new poets working with Hulme, Richard Aldington, and W.S. Flint in 1911-12. Pound helped to expose *Poetry's* readers to the innovations of the European Modernists, including the later French symbolists. The poet was becoming an impersonal god building an artifice of verbal reality. The Byronic hero becomes for the Moderns an alchemist magus labouring over structure. Josipovici has summarized the force of modernism and the stress on medium. He writes that "an art of this kind makes the spectator witness. What is important is not the finished product, but the process."¹¹⁶

Obviously the Modernist movement demanded more than a receptive response from the reader. Yeats, Joyce, Pound, and Eliot enlisted symbols to delineate reality or the state

¹¹⁴ Archibald MacLeish quoted by Foerster and Falk, *American Poetry and Prose*, p. 982.

¹¹⁵ "Ars Poetica," *American Poetry and Prose*, p. 983.

¹¹⁶ Gabriel Josipovici, *The World and the Word: A Study of Modern Fiction*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 133.

of mind. Often these symbols formed complex and elaborate patterns based on myths, previous works of art, sounds, and sensuous appeal. Frequently one image was carried over from poem to poem; the reader had to be a student not only of literary art but of particular movements and artists. The verbal creation dominated meaning as the writer fused subjective and objective elements, striking up new juxtapositions and images which defamiliarized experience. In this process the poet became an impersonal yet powerful inventor and manipulator of words and sometimes of readers as well. The poet saw himself as an agent conveying not always meaning but rather essence. Bradbury and McFarlane point out the language of oxymoron which pervaded the Modernist movement in literature as well as the structural changes which were unmistakable.

An explosive fusion, one might suppose, that destroyed the tidy categories of thought, that toppled linguistic systems, that disrupted formal grammar and the traditional links between words and words, words and things, inaugurating the power of ellipsis and parataxis and bringing in its train the task--to use Eliot's phrase--of making new juxtapositions, new wholes; or, in Hofmannsthal's words, of creating 'from man and beast and dream and thing' an affinity of new relationships.... It is the image of art holding transition and chaos, creation and de-creation, in suspension, which gives the peculiar concentration and sensibility of Modernist art--gives it...its Janus-faced quality.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, "The Name and Nature of Modernism," *Modernism: 1890-1930*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1976), pp. 48-49.

Yeats was absorbed in the Symbolist movement in France and in his early poetry shares much with Mallarmé. Yeats's poetry conceives the imaginative role of the artist and the outer real world as antinomies. He sees in his youthful lyrics a dreamlike artistic chimera and broadly follows Pater's aestheticism. Wilson argues that "when Pater says that experience gives us 'not the truth of eternal outlines, ascertained once for all, but a world of fine gradations and subtly linked conditions, shifting intricately as we ourselves change,' he is stating a point of view exactly similar to that of the Symbolists.... In Yeats we find the aestheticism of Pater carried through to its consequences."¹¹⁸ In his study *Yeats*, Harold Bloom elaborates that Yeats was influenced by Pater and that the poet stands as a Romantic (rather than a Modernist) in the tradition of Blake and Shelley. Yet in his discussion of "Sailing to Byzantium," Bloom argues for some fairly obvious Modernist characteristics of the poem: "'God's holy fire,' in this poem, is not a state where the creator and his creation are one, as in Blake, but rather a state where the creator has been absorbed into his creation, where the art work or 'artifice of eternity' draws all elements into itself."¹¹⁹ Moreover, in his obsession with

¹¹⁸ Wilson, *Axel's Castle*, pp. 32-33.

¹¹⁹ Harold Bloom, *Yeats* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 347.

the impersonality of the poet, with the necessary self-imposition of the objective Mask or Anti-Self, Yeats partakes of the Modernist perspective, in which the poet loses himself in the drama of language and the aesthetic process. If for Yeats in "The Song of the Happy Shepherd," "The words of Arcady are dead," then the consolation is that "Words alone are certain good." Words give a temporary anodyne: "And my own whispering words be comforting."¹²⁰ As the self is absorbed with words and symbols, so is the outside world, which is no longer a reference but a goal. Commenting on the use of symbols, Wilson quotes Yeats's analogy of the writer to "'an old peasant telling stories': "He will use the most extravagant words & illustrations if they suit his purpose. Or he will invent a wild parable and the more his mind is on fire or the more creative it is, the less will he look at the outer world or value it for its own sake. It gives him metaphors and examples, and that is all."¹²¹

Joyce used words and symbols extravagantly in the sub-conscious exploration of an inner world, to the extent that ultimately in *Finnegan's Wake* he created not only a new world but a new language. Joyce disrupted the structure of

¹²⁰ W.B. Yeats, "The Song of the Happy Shepherd," *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats*, ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (New York: Macmillan, 1953), pp. 54-55.

¹²¹ Wilson, *Axel's Castle*, p. 41.

words flowing inexorably toward meaning. His words simply exist. Kenner postulates that words are the topic of Joyce's fiction. "Joyce was hardly more word-conscious than his characters were.... The language of Dublin *is* the subject; his books are about words, the complexity is there, in the way people talk, and Joyce copes with it by making it impossible for us to ignore the word on the page."¹²² Joyce divorced words from meaning in the dialectical process of discerning and restoring intrinsic meaning rather than essences externally signified. In the most basic and banal terms, in nursery rhymes, in everyday words, in street language, in endearments, in curses, in words about food, Joyce discovered profound and exciting concepts. His play with words begins with the commonplace and thrives on contradiction.

By the skill of verbal and linguistic transformations, Joyce creates, as Wilson explains it, "the illusion of a living social organism.... We possess Dublin, seen, heard, smelt and felt, brooded over, imagined, remembered."¹²³

Collington argues that "'non-events' are instinctive elements in Modernist writing."¹²⁴ As for contemporary ludic

¹²² Hugh Kenner, *Dublin's Joyce* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1977), p. 12.

¹²³ Wilson, *Axel's Castle*, pp. 210-11.

¹²⁴ Michael Collington, "Svevo, Joyce and Modernist Time," *Modernism: 1890-1930*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 430.

fiction, the "action" of *Dubliners* and of *Ulysses* centres not on time and event but rather on the movements of mind, on memory, reflection, and the careful selection of words which define reality and foremost, which create it. As in ludic fiction, in Modernist and postmodernist literature alike, the writer takes on the character of a powerful magus. Unlike the ordered narration of nineteenth-century fiction, such god-like omnipotence in Modernist and ludic fiction resides completely in the possibly arbitrary and capricious will of the author. In *Ulysses* Joyce toys with words *qua* music and then the song reverts to words anew. Ellmann points out that "he constantly expanded the monologue by non-representational methods, and in the *Sirens* episode he stylizes it to the point of absurdity. Fictional devices begin to break up as if they had grown sceptical of themselves. The presiding imagination of the book appears more and more distract from his characters with purposes to which they are only tributary."¹²⁵

In the context of Edenic fiction and the ludic realm, it is interesting to consider the potent Adamic motifs in *Ulysses*. Both Leopold and Molly think of the past as paradisaic, as holding the secret of a primal unity. The Eden Stephen hopes to attain resides in words alone. The

¹²⁵ Richard Ellmann, *Ulysses on the Liffey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 109.

garden, water, flower, and nature imagery stand as motifs to work against, as models for dialectical conflict. There is also irony, as when the priest talks of paradise in the liturgical service and the comment is "Said he was going to paradise or is in paradise. Says that over everybody. Tiresome kind of job. But he has to say something."¹²⁶ The linking of paradise and the corpse plays with the Christian concept of the final reward. Hollington remarks, "The paradise-fall-return pattern governs many readings of the novel." He adds, however, "the similarities [between Edenic myth and the symbolic events in *Ulysses*] are surely possibilities deriving from the uses of association, which is the dominant method of the novel, prosecuted through puns, alliterations, homonyms, rhyming phrases, as well as events."¹²⁷ Thus one way of looking at the novel focuses on words, language, and the multifarious uses of verbal play. Kenner notes that "By the time of his mature work Joyce's realization that his subject was language, the protean empty language of the dead city, had so deepened that the reader is at first conscious of little but words and cadences, embalmed.... The subject is 'style' and what style implies."¹²⁸

126 James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Random House Inc., 1946), p. 103.

127 Hollington, pp. 439-40.

128 Kenner, *Dublin's Joyce*, p. 17.

Just as the singing woman in Stevens' "The Idea of Order at Key West" evokes in the author the conviction of the artistically circular vehicle of poetry, so do the words and symbols of *Finnegans Wake* delineate finally not meaning but words, bare and alone. Thinking of *Finnegans Wake* as Stevens' woman, we as readers "Know that there never was a world for her / Except the one she sang and, singing, made."¹²⁹ Without doubt, Joyce's final fiction probes not meaning but language as it postulates a universe of words created by supreme artistic consciousness. Cixous states:

In a sense, while *Stephen Hero* deals with aesthetic gestation, *Portrait* is the gestation of a soul venturing among words, while in *Ulysses* and after the sentence itself becomes the scene of experience. Usually, in *Finnegans Wake*, the words themselves contain the meaning carried by an ordinary sentence, while the linear construction of the latter is first abandoned and replaced by a kind of verbal galaxy. At a certain level of prose and of the artist's sensibility, the word and the perceptible appearance of the thing resuscitate similar visions, as though the word itself were an object which one encountered and turned into an epiphany.¹³⁰

The sense of entropy dominating *Gravity's Rainbow* is present in *Finnegans Wake*. For Joyce entropy is conceived as the breaking down of ideas and consciousness into words, utterances disordered and chaotic. In *Finnegans Wake* Joyce's

¹²⁹ Wallace Stevens. "The Idea of Order at Key West," *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*, 16th rpt., 18th printing (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1978), pp. 128-30.

¹³⁰ Hélène Cixous, *The Exile of James Joyce*, trans. from the French by Sally A.J. Purcell (New York: David Lewis, 1972), p. 500.

play with words comes as a premonition of a self-destructive universe such as Pynchon's. *Gravity's Rainbow* chronicles World War II, and the entropic vision of Joyce's novel was presented to the world on the eve of that war. For both authors the twentieth century annihilated meaning. Forster's old dictum, "Only connect" rings in reference to these works obsolete and irrelevant. For Pynchon, as was the case for Joyce, there exists nothing to which to connect, no secure anchor in the real world, no firm continuity with history and culture to define and expand human experience. We are left not with meaning but with words.

Kenner exclaims that "Joyce worked seventeen years to push the work away from 'meaning,' adrift into language; nothing is to be gained by trying to push it back."¹³¹ This in turn to words as the essence of literary art was articulated by T.S. Eliot. He argued that "the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality." He defined this as the "process of depersonalization."¹³² Against the Romantics, against Wordsworth, Eliot vowed that "poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality."¹³³

¹³¹ Kenner, *Dublin's Joyce*, p. 304.

¹³² T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *Selected Essays*. New Ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1964), p. 7.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

In a staunch revolt against the Romantic "I," Eliot saw the poet as a medium through which words travel to reach the reader. The poet is "the transforming catalyst."¹³⁴ For Eliot the consciousness of the writer is crucial as is the disappearance of this consciousness in words. Kenner notes about Eliot, "Like the Symbolists, he is not there, but has withdrawn in favor of the language."¹³⁵ Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," written in 1919, contains the germ of his poetic theory, for which he supplies a brief summary:

The analogy was that of the catalyst. When the two gases previously mentioned are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphurous acid. This combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected; has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged. The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material.¹³⁶

For Eliot, words generate reality and reflect in their transience the despair of civilization. The faith of the contemporary writer lies also in the word and the word alone. Eliot's wariness holds true:

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹³⁵ Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1971, 2nd printing, 1973), p. 136.

¹³⁶ Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," pp. 7-8.

Words move, music moves
 Only in time; but that which is only living
 Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
 Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
 Can words or music reach
 The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
 Moves perpetually in its stillness.¹³⁷

For the poet this dependence on words contains a central contradiction, for "Words strain, / Crack and sometimes break, under the burden, / Under the tension, slip, slide, perish, / Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place, / Will not stay still."¹³⁸ Words exemplify the tenuous hold humanity has on existence. By employing words in this fashion, Eliot contributes to the transformation of form into content. This transformation was a key assumption of both Russian Formalism and New Criticism, and it foreshadows the controlling ethos of postmodernist ludic fiction. Jameson comments that the "geological shift of form into content is a relatively recent literary and linguistic phenomenon, but one which in modern times has become in some sense absolute."¹³⁹

Following Joyce and Eliot, the New Critics have seen the poet as properly refined out of existence. Eliot tells us that "if poetry is a form of communication, yet that

137 T.S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton," "Four Quartets," *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969; rpt. 1970), V, lines 1-7, p. 175.

138 *Ibid.*, V, lines 13-17.

139 Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 204.

which is to be communicated is the poem itself, and only incidentally the experience and the thought which have gone into it."¹⁴⁰ Cleanth Brooks interprets poetry in formalist terms as a system of paradoxes and arrangements of words, "necessary overlappings, discrepancies, contradictions." He notes that "T.S. Eliot has commented upon 'that perpetual slight alteration of language, words perpetually juxtaposed in new and sudden combinations,' which occurs in poetry. It is perpetual; it cannot be kept out of the poem; it can only be directed and controlled."¹⁴¹ Brooks attacked Yvor Winters' "heresy of paraphrase" in a condemnation of the separation of form and meaning. Brooks argues that form and content are a unity, and this recalls Coleridge's notion of poetry as an organic whole. Brooks adamantly states that "most of the distempers of criticism come about from yielding to the temptation to take certain remarks which we make *about* the poem--statements about what truth it gives or about what formulations it illustrates--for the essential core of the poem itself."¹⁴²

Ransom believes formal considerations are the primary basis for the aesthetic judgement. He remarks, "it is

140 T.S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism: Studies in the Relation of Criticism to Poetry in England* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964; rpt. 1970), p. 30.

141 Cleanth Brooks, *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1949; rev. ed., 1968), p. 6.

142 *Ibid.*, pp. 162-3.

an order of content, rather than a kind of content, that distinguishes texture from structure, and poetry from prose.... I suggest that the differentia of poetry as discourse is an ontological one."¹⁴³ Again we hear the echo of Coleridge: "Let it be said frankly that a poem is an organism in action."¹⁴⁴ In England, I.A. Richards took up the Coleridge strain as he postulated an affective, psychological, "scientific" approach to literature and criticism. He declared that "the two pillars upon which a theory of criticism must rest are an account of value and an account of communication." He continues in *Principles of Literary Criticism* to push for the organicist Coleridgean view of poetry and to urge the elimination of beliefs, to insist upon "freedom from actual assertion."¹⁴⁵ In *Practical Criticism*, Richards heralds the flexibility of audience to subject matter, without the imposition of external hindrances such as the character of the poet or his period.¹⁴⁶

143 John Crowe Ransom, "Wanted: An Ontological Critic," *Beating the Bushes: Selected Essays, 1941-1970* (New York: New Directions Books, 1972), p. 2.

144 Ransom, "The Concrete Universal," *Beating the Bushes*, p. 175.

145 I.A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1925), p. 276.

146 See I.A. Richards, *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1929), p. 322.

According to Wimsatt and Brooks, Richards' affective theory concentrates on "synaesthesia--a harmony and equilibrium of our impulses." They criticize this equilibrium as easily confused with vacillation.¹⁴⁷ Although part of the Modernist movement against belief and historical considerations, Richards largely found opposition among the New Critics. Thompson notes that "Richards posed his theory in an absolutist manner, and it was met with an absolutist refutation on the part of the American New Critics, the refutation culminating in Wimsatt's and Beardsley's 'The Affective Fallacy.'"¹⁴⁸

In both "The Intentional Fallacy" and "The Affective Fallacy," published jointly in *The Sewanee Review* in 1946, Wimsatt demonstrated the errors of literary criticism which explores external aspects of the creative process, either from the author's or the reader's perspective. Meaning devolves from the structure and content of the work itself; the writer's intentions and the reader's feelings are ultimately irrelevant. The pivot for the poem is the interrelationship between words *qua* words. In his essay "What to Say about a Poem," Wimsatt postulated

147 William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957; rpt. 1970), pp. 615-16.

148 Ewa M. Thompson, *Russian Formalism and Anglo-American New Criticism: A Comparative Study* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), p. 45.

the fundamental understanding of words and diction in order to explicate meaning; he averred, "In poetry the artifice is art."¹⁴⁹ Wimsatt declared, "There is a gross body of life, of sensory and mental experience, which lies behind and in some sense causes every poem, but can never be and need not be known in the verbal and hence intellectual composition which is the poem. For all the objects of our manifold experience, for every unity, there is an action of the mind which cuts off roots, melts away context--or indeed we should never have objects or ideas or anything to talk about."¹⁵⁰ Wimsatt further argues that application of the affective fallacy would negate universality of words and meaning for the particular, subjective, changeable response. Wimsatt sensibly decries "the measurement of poetic value by the degree of feeling felt by the readers of a given era."¹⁵¹

A detailed examination of Formalism and New Criticism is essential for the provision of a framework in which to

149 W.K. Wimsatt, "What to Say about a Poem," *Hateful Contraries: Studies in Literature and Criticism*, With an Essay on English Meter Written in Collaboration with Monroe C. Beardsley (Lexington, Kentucky: Kentucky Paperbacks, University of Kentucky Press, 1966), p. 241.

150 W.K. Wimsatt, "The Intentional Fallacy," *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*, with two preliminary essays written in collaboration with Monroe C. Beardsley (Lexington, Kentucky: The University of Kentucky Press, 1954), p. 12.

151 W.K. Wimsatt, "The Affective Fallacy," *The Verbal Icon*, p. 27.

view ludic fiction. Nabokov reached his formative years during the heyday of Russian Formalism and the American writers of ludic fiction developed in a literary and academic environment which greatly valued the contributions of the New Critics. Moreover, Formalism and New Criticism cogently illuminate the fundamental assumptions of ludic fiction based on a word-centred, self-contained lexical universe. In the Russian Formalist school the relationship of words within the poetic structure stood as the primary method of coming to know the work of art. The Formalists followed detailed textual analysis and emphasized close and careful reading. They looked to words and patterns or morphology as the keys to a particular work of art. The Russian Futurists and Formalists, active in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Erlich dates Formalism from 1914 to 1930),¹⁵² sought to assign value to the intrinsic work of art.

The leading Formalist critic Shklovsky reacted against the Symbolist movement in Russia, against Bely, its chief proponent. He saw art as technique, as the process of making things difficult to perceive, hence defamiliarized, in order to create and to elongate the process of aesthetic perception, "to make the stone

¹⁵² Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History-Doctrine*, 4th ed. (The Hague: Mouton, 1980), p. 9.

stony."¹⁵³ Shklovsky calls for the exhibition of technique since for him the work of art is largely about coming to know the work of art. We are reminded of Schiller's sense of display or *Schein* as a crucial substantive element in the aesthetic process. Shklovsky hails the chaotic transparency of literary technique and its gaming effect in *Tristram Shandy*. Erlich has noted the inappositeness of Shklovsky's remark that *Tristram Shandy* is "the most typical novel in world literature."¹⁵⁴ On the other hand, Jameson remarks, "I believe that above and beyond the impudence, this sentence is to be taken literally: *Tristram Shandy* is the most typical novel because it is the most novelistic of all novels, taking as its subject-matter the very process of story-telling itself."¹⁵⁵

Erlich controverts the analogies between *L'art pour l'art* and Russian Formalism, particularly since the latter held so little interest in the purpose of art. The Formalists were oriented toward morphology and empiricism, and they possessed scant flair for, or interest in, the speculative. Their orientation was basically positivistic. Concentration was concretely centred on words and verbal

153 Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. and intro. by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 12.

154 Victor Shklovsky, "Sterne's *Tristram-Shandy*: Stylistic Commentary," *Russian Formalist Criticism*, p. 57.

155 Jameson, p. 76.

structures. As part of the heritage of ludic fiction, this aspect of Formalism retains significance. Erlich cites the Formalist Žirmunsky's ideas of poetry, that "it has at its disposal the 'whole nexus of formal-logical relations inherent in the language and incapable of expression in any other branch of art.'" Žirmunsky concludes that "'the material of poetry is neither images nor emotions, but words... Poetry is verbal art.'"¹⁵⁶

The Formalists attended to euphonic considerations, to the sound patterns and metrical forms of poetry, and as Wellek and Warren have written, their preoccupation was for the rhythms and unity of language.¹⁵⁷ Erlich relates that "in Tomáševskij's *Theory of Literature*, the most comprehensive exposition of Formalist methodology, poetic language was defined as 'one of the linguistic systems where the communicative function is relegated to the background and where verbal structures acquire autonomous value.'"¹⁵⁸ This exists as a primary concept of ludic fiction as well. For the members of the Moscow Linguistic Circle and the Petrograd Society for the Study of Poetic

¹⁵⁶ Quoted by Erlich, pp. 174-75.

¹⁵⁷ René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 3rd rev. ed. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963), pp. 159, 170.

¹⁵⁸ Erlich, p. 183.

Language (Opoyaz), literature was the process of signification not of mimesis. Thus the Formalists wished to make the study of literature a science with its own methodology. Erlich emphasizes that "Formalist research soon shifted from phonetics toward semantics or more exactly, toward the interrelations between sound and meaning.... What was involved here was a broader and more mature notion of the verbal sign...."¹⁵⁹ Thomson clarifies the evolution and orientation of Formalism:

...the beginnings are marked both by nineteenth-century positivistic beliefs and by the idealistic literary theories of Belyj. As time went on, the idealistic trend faded away and the 'scientific' (in the sense the neo-positivists use the term) tendency began to gain more and more ground, to finish by taking over the field completely. In the course of this development, the theses put forward by the Russian Formalists and their successors, Czech, French and Bulgarian structuralists, began to parallel more and more closely the postulates of twentieth-century logical positivists. Doubtlessly the fact that among the Formalists there were many linguists contributed to this development: in twentieth-century linguistics the scientific principle has been applied with persistent success. Those who knew linguistics professionally: Jakobson, Tomaševskij, Vinogradov, and others, began to apply their knowledge of the principles of semiotics to the study of literature.¹⁶⁰

As we have seen, the movement away from the poet to the poem, from the author to the work of art and ultimately to the word, became a focal point for the Formalists in the period directly before and after the Russian Revolution, and for the American New Critics during the 1920's, 30's, and

¹⁵⁹ Erlich, p. 184.

¹⁶⁰ Thompson, pp. 108-09.

early 40's. Today such preoccupations form an intrinsic part of contemporary play fiction. Many commentators have spoken of the similarities between the two historically diverse movements which had such force in predicating the central concerns of literature for much of the century. In both we see the formal impulse and the concentration on words coupled with the breaking down of language into verbal models. However, Thomson argues forcefully that "the attitudes of the Russian Formalists and the New Critics sometimes represent a basic polarity within the contemporary language-oriented criticism."¹⁶¹ The political and historical differences must be asserted. Whereas Formalism emerged as a leftist, even revolutionary response to the excesses of Symbolism, as a movement against the interpretation of literature as a series of images, as Belinsky postulated, New Criticism acted as a force of literary and social conservatism. With T.S. Eliot as a key mentor, the New Critics simply sought to reorganize literary criticism along neo-classical lines. Thomson points out that "New Criticism owed much of its vitality to the anti-positivists Eliot and Hulme."¹⁶² In this light we can understand the impulse toward the examination of classical and metaphysical literature. Here was an absorption in the ordered past and a turning against the

161 Thompson, p. 7.

162 Thompson, p. 109.

Romantic surge toward freedom and consciousness in emotion and individuality. The New Critics sought to bypass poet and audience for the plenitude of words alone; the Formalists proposed, with the Futurists, a far more sweeping system of scientific, linguistic analysis which was deemed by its proponents to be "militantly anti-traditional," to paraphrase Erlich. In contrast to the New Critics, the Formalists also "were anti-academic in the extreme."¹⁶³

Pomorska demonstrates the indebtedness of the Formalists to the phenomenology of Husserl, to the perception of the autonomy of language and form. Questions of history and culture were explicitly disavowed, as with the New Critics. "Husserl maintained that all non-material, i.e. spiritual, phenomena have their own independent existence. Moreover, these phenomena can be studied only through their essence, which is manipulated in its pure form in each of them individually."¹⁶⁴ The emphasis centred on the specific formal analysis of a particular work rather than on any historical perspective. In this surge toward synchrony as articulated by Saussure and taken up by the Moscow Linguistic Circle, the Formalist method of studying language as a self-refracting system became the dominant

¹⁶³ Erlich, p. 275.

¹⁶⁴ Krystyna Pomorska, *Russian Formalist Theory and its Poetic Ambiance* (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), p. 19.

methodology. This is a legacy inherited by contemporary ludic fiction.

To Ferdinand de Saussure we owe the fundamental precepts for discovering the synchronic operations of language freed from the exclusively diachronic grasp of the neo-grammarians. For Saussure, *la langue* or language (as opposed to *la parole* or speech) "is a self-contained whole and a principle of classification. As soon as we give language first place among the facts of speech, we introduce a natural order into a mass that lends itself to no other classification."¹⁶⁵ Saussure insists upon the purely arbitrary nature of the signs used in language to signify a particular concept. "Language is a convention, and the nature of the sign that is agreed upon does not matter."¹⁶⁶ The signs of the language system are defined by their differences in the relational network; there are no referents outside this system. Saussure argues that "in language there are only differences. Even more important: a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences *without positive terms*. Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has

¹⁶⁵ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye in collaboration with Albert Reidlinger, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), p. 9.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonetic differences that have issued from the system."¹⁶⁷ Culler applies the following analogy to explain ideality, value, and meaning in language: "Thus one can say that the units of the game of chess have no material identity: there are no physical properties necessary to a king, etc. Identity is wholly a function of difference within a system."¹⁶⁸

Although it was the American pragmatist C.S. Peirce who coined the term semiology as the study of signs, it was pre-eminently Saussure who established the basis for the discipline. The Swiss linguist posited that "language is a system of signs that express ideas."¹⁶⁹ He demonstrated that "the linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image."¹⁷⁰ He called "the combination of a concept and a sound-image a sign" and designated the concept as the *signified* and the sound-image as the *signifier*.¹⁷¹ Saussure was careful to distinguish the linguistic sign from the term *symbol*, since the latter does not retain an arbitrary nature. It is

167 *Ibid.*, p. 120.

168 Jonathan Culler, *Saussure* (Glasgow: Collins, Fontana Modern Masters Series, 1976), p. 28.

169 Saussure, p. 16.

170 Saussure, p. 66.

171 Saussure, p. 67.

rather purposive. Although the individual speaker cannot control the nature of the sign on whim, there is no logical or causal relationship between the signifier and the signified.

In its scrutiny of language and the use of words, ludic fiction assumes the arbitrary character of verbal games. Speaking of Beckett, Nabokov, Barth, and Borges, Fowler comments on the explicit linguistic foundation of contemporary literature: "Although experimentalism is not a novelty in the history of fiction, the strong insistence in much of this new writing on the linguistic nature of fiction itself is significant."¹⁷² The verbal play in ludic fiction shares much with Saussure's description of the sign. As Huizinga articulates in *Homo Ludens*, the selection of rules for a game or for play devolves from a purely arbitrary base but once determined, the rules remain rigid. Saussure suggests "that the individual does not have the power to change a sign in any way once it has become established in the linguistic community."¹⁷³ So is it too with the verbal games of ludic fiction; their choice is capricious but once established the pattern of play serves as the basis for an entire set of fictional patterns put forward with a dogged albeit humorous

¹⁷² Roger Fowler, *Linguistics and the Novel* (London: Methuen, 1977), p. 4.

¹⁷³ Saussure, p. 69.

persistence. In addition, once the particular ludic mode is adopted, the fictional strategies and motifs become measured and even predictable.

Saussure is diligent in his emphasis of the opposition between diachrony and synchrony in the study of linguistics, that is, between a linguistic analysis based on historical factors and evolution and the examination of language founded on static laws operating at any point in the language-state. Synchrony focuses on the speaker. Thody cogently stresses that "no one, in Saussure's way of looking at language, can ever possess the whole *langue*." Yet individual speech can exist "only by virtue of the underlying *langue* that provides both a community of shared linguistic experience and the very thought-patterns by means of which the members of that community make themselves understood."¹⁷⁴ Saussure remarks that "synchrony has only one perspective, the speakers', and its whole method consists of gathering evidence from speakers; to know to just what extent a thing is a reality, it is necessary and sufficient to determine to what extent it exists in the minds of the speakers."¹⁷⁵ This focus on the mind of the speaker perfectly articulates the magus-like nature of ludic fiction, at least to the ostensible elimination of prospective and retrospective aspects, which Saussure

¹⁷⁴ Philip Thody, *Roland Barthes: A Conservative Estimate* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. ix.

¹⁷⁵ Saussure, p. 90.

associated with diachrony.

Jakobson condemns Saussure's synchronic preoccupation with "a static, uniform system of mandatory rules, ignorant of the different functions of language and...the time and space factors."¹⁷⁶ Most structuralists are themselves intransigent when it comes to the elimination of diachrony or historical analysis. Jameson offers the following commentary concerning the synchronic proclivity shared by the Formalists and structuralists:

We must here underscore a tendency which we found at work in an analogous moment of Formalism...which we must understand as a deformation structurally inherent in the method. This is the transformation of diachronic events into synchronic categories, the replacement of the event by the static concept, of the verb by the neologism. Greimas has himself evoked this tendency, as a kind of baleful spell hanging over linguistic analysis, "which, whenever one opens one's mouth to speak of relationships, causes the latter to be at once transformed, as though by enchantment, into substantives, or in other words into terms whose meaning we must then negate by postulating new relationships, and so forth. Any metalanguage we are able to imagine for the purposes of speaking about meaning turns out to be not only a signifying, but also a substantifying language as well, which freezes all intentional dynamism into a conceptual terminology."¹⁷⁷

The tendency here is toward a mechanistic, reductive, and static system. The signifier and the signified delineate language patterns which designate the limits of the structuralist endeavour. The world is not only not enough; it is irrelevant. It is not difficult to discern

¹⁷⁶ Roman Jakobson, *Main Trends in The Science of Language* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1973), p. 38.

¹⁷⁷ Jameson, p. 126.

that the model-based analyses of structuralism radically abbreviate the force and extent of human consciousness. One is always searching not for the idea but for "the model behind the idea," which Derrida has labelled the work of "deconstruction."¹⁷⁸ Ludic fiction partakes of the auto-referentiality of structuralism and indeed of Modernist art in general, but at its best Adamic play fiction differs in attitudes about consciousness and the ability of the mind to posit freedom. At worst, however, ludic literature degenerates into predictable models of parody and empty gamesmanship, which like the proponents of structuralism, retreat from aesthetic idealism and from any expansive epistemology by which man creates his world. Both Formalists and structuralists dwell on function and product to the exclusion of the power of the individual artistic process and the neglect of author and audience as prime movers in the fictional world. Jameson has averred, "The most scandalous aspect of Structuralism as a movement-- its militant anti-humanism, as found both in Marxists (Althusser) and in anti-Marxists (Foucault) alike--must be understood conceptually as a refusal of the older categories of human nature and of the notion that man (or human consciousness) is an intelligible entity or field of study in himself."¹⁷⁹ The qualities of man's humanity

178 Jameson, p. 136.

179 Jameson, p. 139.

are forgotten. The danger of structuralism and of ludic fiction comes in ignoring the human condition for the easily articulated and repeatable paradigm. Kurzweil confirms this pattern. She demonstrates that for the structuralist Ricoeur the outer world is gradually ignored: "By finding meaning through linguistics, Ricoeur causes political and social issues to recede." About another French structuralist she argues, "Barthes' drift into texts represented a further depoliticization."¹⁸⁰

The neglect of the social realm common to Formalism, structuralism, and ludic fiction encountered strong criticism. Trotsky decried Formalism. Although of course he had in mind the utility of social realism, he also gauged the full measure of Formalist limitations in thought and theory. Trotsky does not deny the formal basis of art nor its existence as an autonomous entity. He acknowledges that "art can and must be judged from the point of view of its achievements in form, because there can be no art without them."¹⁸¹ For the radical leader the concentration on sounds and verbal patterns in the midst of social and political revolution seemed, understandably, absurd. The Formalists' neglect of the real world appalled Trotsky. As a materialist he posited that the deed or the reality

¹⁸⁰ Edith Kurzweil, *The Age of Structuralism: Lévi-Strauss to Foucault* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 107, 177.

¹⁸¹ Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, trans. Rose Strunsky (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ann Arbor Paperbacks for the Study of Communism and Marxism, The University of Michigan Press, 1960), p. 179.

must necessarily precede the word: "The poet can find material for his art only through his own artistic consciousness."¹⁸² To ignore the fact that art is the product of man, of the social individual, is for Trotsky tantamount to disregarding the whole history of the struggle for freedom. Trotsky agrees that "personal lyrics of the very smallest scope have an absolute right to exist within the new art. Moreover, the new man cannot be formed without a new lyric poetry. But to create it, the poet himself must feel the world in a new way."¹⁸³ For Trotsky the absorption in synchrony denies the history of man's struggle for full consciousness as it lingers on the low mechanistic level of words as playthings in a void. Much the same indictment can be made of ludic fiction, of its predilection for verbal categories, naming, for games and tangential references, elaborate tropes, parodies of meaning. Trotsky views the artist separated from society, exiled into the world of self, as a lost creature unable to struggle out of a pervasive bewilderment:

The form of art is, to a certain and very large degree, independent, but the artist who creates this form, and the spectator who is enjoying it, are not empty machines, one for creating form and the other for appreciating it. They are living people with a crystallized psychology representing a certain unity, even if not entirely harmonious. This psychology is the result of social conditions. The creation and

182 Trotsky, p. 167.

183 Trotsky, p. 170.

perception of art forms is one of the functions of this psychology. And no matter how wise the Formalists try to be, their whole conception is simply based upon the fact that they ignore the psychological unity of the social man, who creates and who consumes what has been created.¹⁸⁴

In his essay, "Art as Establisher of Value,"

Wallace Stevens has discussed the appearance of form as the delineation of content and of human consciousness:

"The first [idea] is that the style of a poem and the poem itself are one; the second is that the style of gods and the gods themselves are one; the third is that in an age of disbelief, when the gods have come to an end, when we think of them as the aesthetic projections of a time that has passed, men turn to a fundamental glory of their own and from that create a style of bearing themselves in reality."¹⁸⁵ Stevens avers "that, above everything else, poetry is words.... A poet's words are of things that do not exist without the words.... Poetry is a revelation in words by means of the words."¹⁸⁶ A host of modern thinkers, from Malraux to Buber, sees forms, words, colours, sounds as the fundamental aspects of the work of art, supplanting content altogether. Malraux views modern painting as the quintessential achievement of form. He

184 Trotsky, p. 171.

185 Wallace Stevens, "Art as Establisher of Value," *The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature*, ed. Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson, Jr. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 218.

186 *Ibid.*, p. 221.

discerns in Expressionism, Fauvism, and Cubism the central significance of colour. He comments that "the triumph of art was also the triumph of color."¹⁸⁷ Buber postulates, "This is the eternal source of art: a man is faced by a form which desires to be made through him into a work."¹⁸⁸

The absolute distinctness of words in themselves, separate from precedents and antecedents, defines the order of verbal play in the ludic novel and helps explain the frequent sense of discontinuity, digression, and tangential speculation, from the disunities of *The Magus* to the paradoxes of love and lust in *Lolita* and the anarchic moments of *Gravity's Rainbow*. Saussure's analogy of language with chess moves postulates the relationship of words in ludic fiction, in the arbitrary and disharmonious nature of play:

In a game of chess any particular position has the unique characteristic of being freed from all antecedent positions; the route used in arriving there makes absolutely no difference; one who has followed the entire match has no advantage over the curious party who comes up at a critical moment to inspect the state of the game; to describe this arrangement, it is perfectly useless to recall what had just happened ten seconds previously. All this is equally applicable to language and sharpens the radical distinction between diachrony and synchrony. Speaking operates only on a language-state, and the changes that intervene between states have no place in either state.¹⁸⁹

187 André Malraux, "Art as the Modern Absolute," *The Modern Tradition*, p. 32.

188 Martin Buber, "The Primary Words," *The Modern Tradition*, p. 873.

189 Saussure, p. 89

The concentration on the momentary experience of the word and on the literary game elicits an immediate response from the reader based not on the cumulative general pattern of the fiction so much as it is derived directly from the given, specific ludic engagement. There is an undeniable synchronic focus, with little of the traditional character development or conventional temporal and spatial continuity. In many of his stories, Borges seeks consciously to destroy diachronic unity; in "The Secret Miracle" and "Pierre Menard" he deliberately plays with distortions of time and space. Essentially as we shall see, it is the aim of Edenic fiction to project itself out of time into prelapsarian fulfillment. Language marks the individual means of creating the aesthetic Eden. The writers of ludic fiction discern in the structure of words the substance of literature. For them the formal arrangement and play of language constitute the aesthetic goal. They would claim for their art what Hjelmslev claimed for "a true linguistics," that is, "a self-sufficient totality, a structure *sui generis*."¹⁹⁰

Hjelmslev argues that to attempt a linguistic theory, "we shall best achieve this aim by forgetting the past, to a certain degree, and by starting from the beginning in all cases where the past has yielded nothing of positive

¹⁹⁰ Louis Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, trans. Francis J. Whitfield (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1961), pp. 5-6.

usefulness."¹⁹¹ Sapir postulates that although language derives from society, the basis of language analysis lies not in culture, speech, or physiology but in form. He declares, "The ease with which speech symbolism can be transferred from one sense to another, from technique to technique, itself indicates that the mere sounds of speech are not the essential fact of language which lies rather in the classification, in the formal patterning, and in the relating of concepts. Once more, language as a structure, is on its inner face the mold of thought."¹⁹² Thus although "language is an immensely ancient heritage," any analytic approach must confront it as "the elements of speech," syntax, and structure, in a given synchronic instance.¹⁹³

Benjamin Whorf carried this further. He delineated a particular linguistic structure not as a reflection of reality but quite possibly the generative force of that reality. The self-sufficiency of the language unit thus for Whorf is an implicit entity. In the principle of linguistic relativity, as articulated by this American linguist and student of Sapir, "the structure of a human

191 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

192 Edward Sapir, *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1921), pp. 21-22.

193 *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 22.

being's language influences the manner in which he understands reality and behaves with respect to it."¹⁹⁴ Whorf signals that on a basic level the structure of language preconditions the nature of conceptualizations. For him, linguistics determines ideology. Pointing to the considerable divergence in time conceptions between the English language and Hopi, Whorf concludes that

Concepts of 'time' and 'matter' are not given in substantially the same form by experience to all men but depend upon the nature of the language or languages through the use of which they have been developed. They do not depend so much upon ANY ONE SYSTEM (e.g., tense or nouns) within the grammar as upon the ways of analyzing and reporting experience which have become fixed in the language as integrated 'fashions of speaking' and which cut across the typical grammatical classifications, so that such a 'fashion' may include lexical, morphological, syntactic, and otherwise systemically diverse means coordinated in a certain frame of consistency.¹⁹⁵

In ludic fiction, Whorf's postulate regarding the ability of language to structure thought takes on an idealistic mould preserving his basic tenets. This is achieved by the thorough self-consciousness of author and protagonist in using language as a playful Edenic apparatus. The author creates characteristic language patterns and a unique fictional world, as for instance, Barth achieves through overstatement and parody in "Lost in the Funhouse."

¹⁹⁴ Benjamin Whorf, *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, ed. and intro. John B. Carroll, Foreword by Stuart Chase (Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1956), p. 23.

¹⁹⁵ Whorf, p. 158.

Even were we to accept Whorf's theory wholeheartedly, we might without sophism suggest that there exists in it a strong potential idealism, for the recognition that language determines reality can be applied to achieve the reality we desire by manipulating linguistic patterns. The individual can gain control through a plenary awareness of the manner in which language generates a certain predictability of thought. By this knowledge and such actions, the writers of ludic fiction hope to control language, to create an evolutionary situation in which language becomes a tool for man to pattern a new reality. The old uses of language, deterministic syntax, and set patterns must change. The projection of ludic worlds indicates that a new consciousness about words can effect changes in our perception of the world and of social relationships. Eco suggests that aesthetic language may ultimately entail "a complete reorganizing of our conceptual impression of the universe."¹⁹⁶ Eco states, "the artist lends to an outward phenomenon of language an inner significance...; just *which* phenomena the literary artist will choose for the embodiment of his meaning is arbitrary from the point of view of the 'user' of the work of art. To overcome the impression of an arbitrary association in the work of art, the reader must

¹⁹⁶ Umberto Eco, "On the possibility of generating aesthetic messages in an Edenic language," *Russian Formalism: A collection of articles and texts in translation*, ed. Stephen Bann and John E. Bowlt (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1973), p. 163.

seek to place himself in the creative center of the artist himself--and re-create the artistic organism."¹⁹⁷ Yet Sapir notes that "the sense of almost unlimited freedom which each individual feels in the use of his language is held in leash by a tacitly directing norm."¹⁹⁸

The contrast between structure and randomness is a pervasive antinomy in ludic fiction. As the author builds meaning he simultaneously seeks to subvert or destroy it through multifarious games and parody. Thus the cryptogrammatic ploys of Clare Quilty in *Lolita* are counterposed against the utter velleity of Humbert's mobile drive across America. The search for the hero in *The Crying of Lot 49* delineates both Oedipa's efforts toward meaning and the empty chaos of Southern California, its society, and culture. The writers of contemporary ludic fiction are lost without normative measures for their parody. Capricious gamesmanship on the part of authors and their characters-personae balances against the refinement of carefully structured words and verbal patterns. Mukařovský describes the inherent polarities operant in language, the tension between organization and fragmentation in aesthetic analysis:

"If we nevertheless differentiate between the unstructured

¹⁹⁷ Leo Spitzer, *Linguistics and Literary History: Essays in Stylistics* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), pp. 28-29.

¹⁹⁸ Sapir, p. 148.

and the structured esthetic, we want to use these concepts to point out the internal antinomy contained in the esthetic, the antinomy between freedom and boundedness, between uniqueness and generality which in extreme cases leads to almost pure unstructuredness, or conversely, structuredness."¹⁹⁹

It is crucial to consider the parallels between linguistic, formalist and structuralist trends and the lexical gamesmanship prevalent in ludic fiction today. Critics of linguistic philosophy and fiction as play protest against the narrowness of concern, the obsession with language games and words *qua* words rather than with ideas, social issues or metaphysical concepts. What is missing in both literature and philosophy is any sense of ontological order, a notion of being, or perceptions about man's relationship with the universe. Although a supporter of Wittgensteinian philosophy such as Kenny would argue that "In the *Investigations* the use of a word is its part in a language-game, in a form of life,"²⁰⁰ Kundera sees larger topics to be addressed. "What needs to be done," he argues, "is to show in some detail that there are important philosophical problems which are not

199 Jan Mukařovský, "The Esthetics of Language," *A Prague Reader on Esthetics, Literary Structure, and Style*, trans. Paul L. Garvin (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1964), p. 45.

200 Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1973), p. 223.

about words, not generated by misuse of ordinary language and not soluble by the method recommended by Wittgenstein."²⁰¹ One might posit that ludic fiction operates, as does linguistic philosophy, in a consciously-chosen vacuum.

Although ludic fiction shares with linguistic philosophy a central absorption with words *qua* words, integrated into systematic language games, and a propensity toward formalist scrutiny, a sharp difference surrounds the specific perception of the world. In the analyses to follow, we hope to show the controlling focus of aesthetic idealism underlying the ludic element in fiction. The "real" world is not accepted in play literature as given, for the world as it exists is not enough. It is the goal of ludic fiction to create the world anew, to demonstrate the Adamic impulse in words and concepts, so that in effect the world is transformed when merged with the realm of mind. The very nature of Absolute Idealism and its aesthetic corollary in ludic fiction assumes that man is an unalienated, a free, being. In contrast, linguistic philosophers are adamant in their rejection of idealism and a theory of knowledge. Stegmüller argues that for Wittgenstein the transcendental subject "is the subject that understands a logically exact language. Of such a subject,

²⁰¹ C.W.K. Mundle, *A Critique of Linguistic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 274.

[Wittgenstein]...says 'The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.' The 'my' here refers not to my personal ego but to the transcendental subject whose language fixes the logical space of the possible worlds."²⁰²

The study to follow seeks not to praise ludic fiction but rather to offer an interpretation and understanding of it. The preceding synoptic comments serve to elucidate the relationship of ludic fiction to the literary and philosophical background of Western society. Contemporary Edenic literature exists in the mainstream of a tradition which it modifies and enriches. The movement is more than derivative but it is not wholly innovative. Its manifest weaknesses are extensive. When such fiction loses itself in the funhouse of language by an abandonment of the larger issues of man's role in the society he helps to create and to perpetuate, thus does it waste meaning in favour of trivia and solipsism. If words in fiction devolve, as for some of the Russian Formalists, to a scrutiny of stresses and sounds, to euphony, to the exclusion of the relationship between the mind and society, then these words and such criticism become empty noises. If the structuralist dead-end of architectonic description prevails in Adamic fiction at the expense of consciousness realizing freedom, or indeed at the cost of an ordered expression

²⁰² Stegmüller, *Main Currents in Contemporary German, British and American Philosophy*, p. 420.

of the inherent contradictions of the human condition, then such fiction fails. Insofar as ludic fiction synthesizes verbal play with the creation of a new world of mind, to the dialectical achievement in fiction of unalienated man in a free society, it merits criticism, analysis, and attention. If as Nabokov urged "'We should always remember that the work of art is invariably the creation of a new world,'"²⁰³ we must also never forget that we have more than words to play with. We may argue with Schiller that the reality of mind in art serves to inform a potential, palpable new universe made possible by full consciousness of the infinite capacity of the human individual to know himself and to change his world. At best, therefore, ludic fiction acclaims the stirring idealism of Josiah Royce: "Arise, then, freemen, stand forth in thy world. It is God's world. It is also thine."²⁰⁴

203 Vladimir Nabokov, from *Lectures on Literature* quoted by Robert Alter, "From Books to Cultural Questions," *New York Times Book Review*, October 12, 1980, p. 38.

204 Josiah Royce, excerpt from *The World and the Individual*, cited in G. Watts Cunningham, *The Idealistic Argument*, p. 291.

CHAPTER TWO

Eden as a Lexical Playground

The Edenic myth is an ancient one and has appeared in Western culture in fairly continuous fashion since Biblical times. The Christian religion focuses on the legend of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and the notion of the Fortunate Fall. Before this the ancient Greeks had honoured the Arcadian ideal in pastorals commending innocence and simplicity, and in the Renaissance the notion of a secular Golden Age took hold of the popular and literary imagination. The image of Eden in contemporary ludic fiction rejects religion and becomes secular as the author and audience partake of the godlike role of creating their own world in which to live. Ludic fiction unifies the innocence and experience of the primal garden, where the creation myth is transferred from an omnipotent God to the individual human being. A basic result of banishment from the Garden of Eden was that Adam and Eve turned inward to themselves and to their own resources and actions for sustenance. In effect, they had to take upon themselves the role of providing for their needs that was formerly the sole providence of Yahweh. Joseph Campbell quotes Jane Ellen Harrison in this regard:

In the Garden of Eden, on the other hand, a different [ambivalent] mood prevails. For the Lord God (the written Hebrew name is Yahweh) cursed the serpent when he knew that Adam had eaten the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; and he said to his angels: "'Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever' --- therefore Yahweh sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim ... and a flaming sword ... to guard the way to the tree of life."¹

The artist in ludic fiction becomes a new Adamic figure, a magician teasing the reader as he plays his godlike games. Ironically, then, by the plenary loss of Eden, man realizes the potential to replace it with his own creation. In the life of art, exile from the garden forces man into a new relationship with nature, and implies a strong potential for independent action as man progresses to a position of self-determination. By the act of taking up his burden, man gains control. Alan Watts has described this essentially idealistic process of mind, postulating and determining its environment:

But somehow more in line with twentieth-century science would be an *organic* image of the world, the world as a body, as a vast pattern of intelligent energy that has a new relationship to us. We are not in it as subjects of a king, or as victims of a

¹ Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God, Volume III: Occidental Mythology* (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1976); rpt. 1978), p. 16.

blind process. We are not *in* it at all. We *are* it! ... Every individual in this organic myth of the world must look upon himself as responsible for the world ... It goes right back to the story in the Garden of Eden: when Adam was asked by the Lord God "Didst thou eat the fruit of the tree whereof I told thee thou shouldst not eat?" Adam replied, "This woman, that thou gavest to me, she tempted me, and I did eat."²

The ludic artist develops some of the powers of the King of the Wood in Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, as he directly and through the protagonist guards and protects the Adamic experience. Humbert Humbert may be seen as a King of the Wood hovering over his Diana-Eve figure, the nymphet Lolita. Similarly, Conchis in *The Magus* performs a priestly, magician-like role for the benefit of Nicholas and on behalf of various young, beautiful women. Borges as author is more directly a King of the Wood preserving his vision of art. Frazer endows the King of the Wood with magical powers and a certain quality of gamesmanship and he notes the significance of rites and rituals, although he voices a distinction between the impersonal, absolute quality of magic and the personal consciousness of religion.³ Yet Frazer goes on to call the magus figure a type of

² Alan Watts, "Western Mythology: Its Dissolution and Transformation," in *Myths, Dreams and Religion*, ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: Dutton, 1970) pp. 22-3.

³ Sir James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, One Volume, Abridged Edition (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 60.

"man-god,"⁴ and this is precisely the function of the Adamic archetype. Moreover, Vickery demonstrates the pervasive irony of Frazer's quest romance when he argues, "And finally there is irony employed for comic purposes and directed at his own controlling concepts, like that of the dying and reviving god." As with Coover and Pynchon, "Frazer's irony begins in realism with a wry recognition of human folly and broadens out into a mythic treatment of men who imitate gods, are sacrificed to the needs of society ..."⁵ The pervasive tone of ludic fiction is ironic and comic.

The Adamic quest in contemporary fiction searches for an essential freedom of mind, and the protagonist exists, as Underwood phrases it, to articulate "the mythic function of philosophy," by assisting "in the birth of a new consciousness which is itself a restoration of man to the full-ness of his being and a realization of his relationship with Being."⁶ What the Adamic heroes of ludic fiction have in common is the freedom of consciousness to create a self-defining, autonomous realm patterned by the play of language and the inner spirit of the magus-gamesman, who is no longer

4 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

5 John B. Vickery, *The Literary Impact of The Golden Bough* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 138.

6 Richard A. Underwood, "Myth, Dream, and the Vocation of Contemporary Philosophy," in *Myths, Dreams, and Religion*, ed. Joseph Campbell (New York: Dutton, 1970), p. 244.

controlled, but is rather the controlling force. If the concrete metaphors of Eden lay the groundwork for the ludic imagination, they yet do not confine it. The spirit of consciousness and the freedom of mind transcend, in essence, the new world garden as they secure for man the play of words and ideas. Thus the myths of Eden, of Arcadia, of a Golden Age, are touchstones by which to compare the far greater and finer possibilities of the human mind to project itself upon the external world and to change the external world according to this projection of the self and its essential freedom.

The dialectic movement of ludic fiction follows the Blakean pattern of innocence giving way to experience, with both synthesized back into a state of "organized innocence." Thus at its dialectic best, the idea of a primal and primitive childhood garden, breached by the corruption of the postlapsarian world, of the machine in the garden,⁷ rises to maturity in the artistic production of the adult, and returns to itself as the free consciousness of man in society. The novels and stories in this study concentrate on images of play and on the stratagems of games; both aspects remind us of the free and innocent play of children. If, as Huizinga argues, coeval man has lost the capacity for

7 An important critic on this topic is, of course, Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964; rpt. 1972).

play by an absorption in seriousness,⁸ and as Marcuse avers, that repression and alienation in capitalist society deny the Orphic mood of eros and freedom,⁹ then it becomes clearer why these contemporary authors should turn to an ostensibly regressive symbol, that of play, as a possibility for the free life of the mind. The critic Hassan notes an "escape toward freedom," in the focus on "childhood and youth," in recent American fiction.¹⁰ Klein has commented that "fiction has the techniques to accomplish the departure from Eden and the coming of worldliness. Innocence travels toward experience."¹¹ The remarkable thing about ludic fiction, remains, however, the capacity for wonder and delight in play, even horrid, tenebrous play, as in Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. For Pynchon, for Nabokov, for Barth, play creates the milieu of freedom.

The *mythos* of the Adamic experience posits a new relationship with the universe and it places the onus on man as creator to determine his own reality. In the

⁸ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955; rpt. 1972), p. 198.

⁹ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (New York: Vintage, 1962), pp. 146-7.

¹⁰ Ihab Hassan, *Radical Innocence* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 37-8.

¹¹ Marcus Klein, *After Alienation: American Novels in Mid-Century* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1964), p. 177.

fictions in which this *mythos* is strongest, we find a plethora of motifs which suggest man's creative capacity. It is, moreover, important to note that the protagonists of ludic fiction are ephemerally somewhat successful in actualizing, for themselves, this aesthetic ideal. Humbert eternalizes Lolita, Van finally wins Ada, Henry Waugh maintains his fictional game, Oedipa Maas makes it to the inner sanctuary of Lot 49, Nicholas Urfe gains his chance to play the magus. Ebenezer Cooke mythologizes a world of mind in his poetry and play-acting, and Borges's Pierre Menard supersedes Cervantes's text with an "infinitely richer" one. These protagonists find that they can change reality, at least their individual reality, by the force of play and games, of pleasure and beauty away from the main structures of their social worlds. As Levin has demonstrated about the myth of paradise, "If there is a single unifying concept which runs through the corpus of texts about the golden age, it is pleasure -- pleasure unabashed, as Tasso is at pains to specify." Levin continues:

Each of the many different versions, with some regional variance, seems to take place against the same setting: a pleasance or pleasant landscape, the *locus amoenus*. Such images were projections of ideas, skeptical and naturalistic in purport, fostering an emphasis on free will, an ethic of hedonism, a cult of beauty ...

"The lament for a golden age is only a lament for golden men," wrote Thoreau in his journal. In either case, it remains a lament, and its mode has been prevailingly elegiac.

However, there have been occasions when elegy was transformed into carnival, most spectacularly at the courts and in the cities of the Renaissance. The humanistic revival of learning conjoined with the unprecedented efflorescence of the arts to act out the fancy that the golden age had returned ...

... No discovery can have made more impact on the European consciousness than the exploration of the Americas.... The voyagers reported on the natives of the western hemisphere in language which created a new myth ...¹²

As Pater tells us in *The Renaissance*, the revival of the arts during this period sought to recapture the light and intensity of the Greek golden age. Giamatti has written, "In the epics of the Renaissance, the garden was dealt with at length for perhaps the last time in Western literature. We would be mistaken, however, if we concluded that man ceased to search for the lost state of bliss and innocence. Indeed, the hope of finding it seemed to increase enormously with the discovery of the New World, and American literature itself is constantly read as a record of the quest for happiness and innocence in the great unspoiled garden."¹³ Marx has pointed out that "most Elizabethan ideas of America were invested in visual images of a virgin land." He goes on to

¹² Harry Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1969), pp. xvi-xviii.

¹³ A. Bartlett Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966; rpt; 1969), p. 6.

describe the fervent ideology of the American Eden:

Although fashionable, the image of America as a garden was no mere rhetorical commonplace. It expressed one of the deepest and most persistent of human motives. When Elizabethan voyagers used this device they were drawing upon utopian aspirations that Europeans always had cherished, and that had given rise, long before the discovery of America, to a whole series of idealized, imaginary worlds ... Centuries of longing and revery had been invested in the conception. What is more, the association of America with idyllic places was destined to outlive Elizabethan fashions by at least two and a half centuries ... As for the ancillary notion of the new continent as a land of plenty, that, as we all know, is now stronger than ever. Today some historians stress what the sixteenth-century voyager called "incredible abundance" as perhaps the most important single distinguishing characteristic of American life. In our time, to be sure, the idea is less closely associated with the landscape than with science and technology.¹⁴

In *The American Scene*, Henry James finds himself reflecting about the New Hampshire mountains, "Why was the whole connotation so *delicately* Arcadian, like that of the Arcadia of an old tapestry, an old legend, an old love story in fifteen volumes ...?"¹⁵ Even so acute an observer as James found himself caught by the idea of the American Eden, in life no less than in his art. Jorge Luis Borges reflects the prevalent ethos of America's endless potential when he begins his study of American literature with this allusion to Bishop Berkeley, "that the last and greatest empire of

14 Marx, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40.

15 Henry James, *The American Scene*, introd. Irving Howe (New York: Horizon Press, 1967), p. 14.

nistory, conceived as a tragedy in five acts, would be that of America.'¹⁶ The European mind, indeed, projected a stirring climax for humanity in the experience of the new world garden. In discussing Cooper, D.H. Lawrence cites the essential escape mentality of America, that sloughing of the European consciousness and "a great release into a new world, a new moral, a new landscape." For him American literature signified banishment and retrieval:

Natty and the Great Serpent are neither equals nor unequals. Each obeys the other when the moment arrives. And each is stark and dumb in the other's presence, starkly himself, without illusion created. Each is just the crude pillar of a man, the crude living column of his own manhood. And each knows the godhead of this crude column of manhood. A new relationship.

The Leatherstocking novels create the myth of this new relation. And they go backwards, from old age to golden youth. That is the true myth of America. She starts old, wrinkled, and writhing in an old skin. And there is a gradual sloughing of the old skin, towards a new youth. It is the myth of America.¹⁷

When Vickery discusses Frazer's quest romance, he underlines the irony and comedy extensive in it and stresses the affinity of *The Golden Bough* with the literature of Modernism, their sharing of archetypes,

¹⁶ Jorge Luis Borges, *An Introduction to American Literature*, trans. and ed. L. Clark Keating and Robert O. Evans (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), p. 6.

¹⁷ D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1924; Phoenix ed., 1964), p. 51.

myths, and the close relationship between character and author. As already indicated, the ludic fiction in this study carries the idea of the ironic quest romance even further, bathing it in the Edenic myth, and transforming it to a state of mind and a magus-like power of creation and renewal. This parallels the objective of Frazer's work, for, as Vickery argues, "the real hero or protagonist of *The Golden Bough* proves to be the civilized mind which explores uncharted ways to uncover new facts about man's way of life, facts which may be simultaneously horrifying, engrossing, and revolutionary."¹⁸

The ludic novel or story is thus in the tradition of the American romance articulated by Richard Chase when he affirms about American literature that "It has not wanted to build an imperium but merely to discover a new place and a new state of mind."¹⁹ Character, author, and reader become new Adams in the structure of ludic fiction and the ironic mode is pervasive. The primacy of plot, of quest, discovery, and ironic reversal and the inattention to character, motivation, and manners may well originate in the propensity of American literature toward the romance form. Chase

¹⁸ Vickery, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

¹⁹ Richard Chase, *The American Novel and its Tradition* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1957), p. 5.

outlines the concerns of this genre, which are indicative also of ludic fiction:

... the romance, following distantly the medieval example, feels free to render reality in less volume and detail. It tends to prefer action to character, and action will be freer in a romance than in a novel, encountering, as it were, less resistance from reality.... The romance can flourish without providing much intricacy of relation. The characters, probably rather two-dimensional types, will not be complexly related to each other or to society or to the past. Human beings will on the whole be shown in ideal relation -- that is, they will share emotions only after these have become abstract or symbolic. To be sure, characters may become profoundly involved in some way, as in Hawthorne or Melville, but it will be a deep and narrow, an obsessive, involvement.... Character itself becomes, then, somewhat abstract and ideal, so much so in some romances that it seems to be merely a function of plot. The plot we may expect to be highly colored. Astonishing events may occur, and these are likely to have a symbolic or ideological, rather than a realistic plausibility.²⁰

The tradition of the romance prepares the way for the formal disposition of contemporary play fiction in which the search for Eden develops into lexical absorption. The concrete verisimilitude of British and European realism was never embraced wholeheartedly by the writers of the new continent. The great works of Melville and Twain really have no counterparts in nineteenth-century European literature. Ishmael and Huck Finn set out to explore the world in the sense of creating the world they wish to explore. The quest

20 Chase, p. 13.

for them centres on the search for self outside of and separate from society. The quest already is inward and explicitly away from the social realm. Huck floats down the Mississippi on a raft and Ishmael sets out to sea on the *Pequod*. Ahab is obsessed with the idea of the great white whale and "Nigger" Jim wants his freedom. This American fiction features one-dimensional characterization and a predictable concentration on a few key motivational concepts. Jay Gatsby shares similar distinctions and rather than having originated from a particular class and locale, he seems to have arisen from "a Platonic conception of himself." He is singularly dominated by the impulse to re-create his vision of himself. Fitzgerald's metaphors are obviously Edenic as Gatsby attempts to grasp a share of the new world garden. His involvement with this dream becomes an obsession acted out in virtual isolation.

We can discern that the solipsism of ludic fiction partakes of the tradition of the Adamic hero of the American romance. The Edenic dream becomes a sort of Roycean manifest destiny of the lexical, mental realm. The faith in geography, in the virgin continent, which lay shattered in the sombre, lifeless wasteland of ashheaps, recurs in contemporary American fiction as an assertion of the self in language. The inward aspect of the narrative continues in uninterrupted fashion; it is, however, given over entirely to the word and to doubts

about the capacity of words and fiction to articulate any sense of the individual as an agent of Absolute Mind. Yet the consciousness of character, author, and reader reaches toward the promise of an apocalyptic freedom in the self-refracting mirrors and games of today's ludic fiction. Fiedler acknowledges the quest and failure of "a chamber of horrors disguised as an amusement park 'fun house,' where we pay to play at terror and are confronted ... with a series of inter-reflecting mirrors which present us ... with our own face."²¹

The assertion of self and a new relationship to the universe delineates the goal of the Borges protagonist as he structures reality from mind; it denotes the play of Henry Waugh with the baseball game as the plenary projection of individual spirit; it tells us much about the role of the magus in Fowles's eponymous novel. A similarity between the Romantic quest and the ideational matrix of ludic fiction becomes clear in the following passage from Abrams, about the growth of consciousness:

Hegel's book [*The Phenomenology*], taken as a literary form, is thus one of the earliest ... of modern involuted works of the imagination. It is a self-contained, self-sustained, and self-implicative puzzle-book, which is enigmatic in the whole and deliberately equivocal in all its parts and passing allusions. But it is evident that ... the work is notably parallel to Wordsworth's exactly contemporary poem on the growth of his own mind ... That is, it is the representative

21 Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Dell, 1960; rev. ed., 1966), p. 7.

autobiography of a spiritual education, told explicitly in the mode of two consciousnesses ...; it justifies evil and suffering as necessary conditions to the achievement of maturity and the recognition of one's identity and aim, is climaxed by the discovery of the implicit principles governing its own organization, evolves both into its own genesis and into the masterwork to which it serves as prelude, and reaches ... -- "that point" in the progressive "experience of consciousness," as Hegel specifies in the last sentence of his Introduction, at which "its exposition. [*Darstellung*] ... falls into coincidence with the genuine *Wissenschaft* of the spirit" ...²²

In the cultivation of individual consciousness moving towards the spirit of freedom, ludic fiction recalls the exigencies of the Romantic drive and the intellectual force of idealism. Yet its proponents firmly reject eschatology for a carapace of parody and play. The inherent problems of such an approach cloud the landscape of the verbal Eden. A carelessness, a looseness prevail. The mirrors in this fun house are distorted. The hope of visionary wisdom is negated by the grotesque self-mockery of writers in love with the emptiness of facile language. We lose sight of anything larger or grander than the threads in the carpet of syntax. In many ways the hope for a new relationship with the universe devolves to verbal and metaphysical entropy, to nothingness adorned by trivia. The body of opposing criticism signifies a strong

²² M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1973), pp. 236-7.

uneasiness with the value of ludic self-involvement for character, author, audience.

Within the fictional endeavours themselves, the figures are often dehumanized, prey to the wanton sport of their creators, if not the gods. The arbitrary nature and randomness of such tales coupled with frequently barren artifice generate laughter in the face of any literary great tradition. Dr. Leavis would find nothing to recommend. In ludic fiction we have no remarkable tradition of singular proportion and few powerful insights into social relations and the wider human condition. The pressure in these novels and stories is hermetic and the focus looks always inward. We suspect that the self-propelling game has lost its purpose. In his polemic against verbal play, Gardner argues, "My objection is not to the game but to the fact that contemporary critics have for the most part lost track of the point of their game, just as artists, by and large, have lost track of the point of theirs." He voices the concerns of a larger audience:

The traditional view is that true art is moral: it seeks to improve life, not debase it. It seeks to hold off, at least for a while, the twilight of the gods and us. I do not deny that art, like criticism, may legitimately celebrate the trifling. It may joke, or mock, or while away the time. But trivial art has no meaning or value except in the shadow of more serious art, the kind of art that beats back the monsters and, if you will, makes the world safe for triviality.... Art is essentially serious and beneficial, a game played against chaos and death,

against entropy. It is a tragic game, for those who have the wit to take it seriously, because our side must lose; a comic game ... because only a clown with sawdust brains would take our side and eagerly join in.²³

Broad moral objections to the ambiguity of the ludic creation, to the confusions of irony and self-parody are voiced by Booth, Kermode, Graff, Gass, Steiner, and Howe. These critics decry the negation of control and clarity in much postmodernist literature. They see rampant weeds growing in the green paradise of the lexical garden. Booth is troubled by the elitism implicit in Nabokov and the erudition of such authors as we examine, by which he means the difficulty with which most readers will approach these works. Booth insists on the importance of value over innovation and experimentalism, and he discerns an obligation of ludic communication as the assumed burden of authorial responsibility:

When human actions are formed to make an art work, the form that is made can never be divorced from the human meanings, including the moral judgments, that are implicit whenever human beings act. And nothing the writer does can be finally understood in isolation from his effort to make it all accessible to someone else -- his peers, himself as imagined reader, his audience. The novel comes into existence as something communicable, and the means of communication are not shameful intrusions unless they are made with shameful ineptitude.²⁴

23 John Gardner, *On Moral Fiction* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), pp. 4, 5-6.

24 Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 397.

Booth claims, "The author makes his readers."²⁵ He scrutinizes the care or slackness of this creative act and warns against the refuge of word *qua* words. Citing Zola's credo about the well-made phrase, Booth argues, "If writing well were simply creating a well-turned phrase, the statement could mean only that.... A well-made phrase can serve the rhetorical purposes of a Hitler as well as the literary purposes of a Zola. But in fiction the concept of writing well must include the successful ordering of your reader's view of a fictional world."²⁶ The entropy of unreliable narration and ironic ambiguity prevalent in ludic fiction perplexes Kermode as well, for he views the "*avant-garde* effort" of postmodernist fiction as a schism severing man from all history and his past and as a degenerative endeavour. The critic argues, "There is an element of convention in the dominant mood of crisis and apocalypse. Novelty becomes the inflation of triviality; the apocalypse is signalled by trivial games, mostly not original. Millennial renovationism declines into antithetical multiform influx; there is more noise than information."²⁷

In *Towards a Sociology of the Novel*, Lucien

25 *Ibid.*, p. 397.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 388.

27 Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967; rpt., 1975), p. 121.

Goldmann defends Sarraute and Robbe-Grillet by emphasizing "the declaration that if these two writers have adopted a different form from that of the nineteenth-century novelists, it is primarily because they had to describe and express a different human reality."²⁸ For Graff this statement remains invalid. He avers, "Such a justification could be given for virtually any piece of nonsense writing (though this is not to equate Robbe-Grillet with nonsense). The critical problem ... is to discriminate between anti-realistic works that provide some true understanding of non-reality and those which are merely symptoms of it."²⁹ Graff elucidates an important point; chaos in the service of chaos clarifies nothing. In Pynchon's entropic symbols particularly we often witness a nihilist groping too frequently and facilely promoted as the sustaining grace of art. Graff is appalled by "the attitude expressed in the more celebratory forms of postmodernism." (He would include Nabokov, Barth, Coover in this category.) He argues, "Here there is scarcely any memory of an objective order of values in the past and no regret over its disappearance in the present. Concepts like 'significant external reality' and 'the human condition' figure only

28 Lucien Goldmann, *Towards a Sociology of the Novel*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications, 1975), p. 133.

29 Gerald Graff, *Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 12.

as symbols of the arbitrary authority and predetermination of a repressive past, and their disappearance is viewed as a liberation."³⁰

William Gass, himself an American postmodernist writer of national reputation, objects to the isolation and self-reflexivity pervasive in contemporary fiction. He criticizes the regressive impulse in Borges and the lack of development in Nabokov. About the general level of contrivance in ludic fiction, Gass submits a warning, applied to the author of *Lolita*: "Nabokov's novels often ... seem like those Renaissance designs of flying machines -- dreams enclosed in finely drawn lines -- which are intended to intrigue, to dazzle, but not to fly."³¹ The sterility of games and language in postmodernist fiction distresses Steiner and he characterizes this pattern as "the retreat from the word," the decline in confidence that truth "can be housed inside the walls of language."³²

In *Extraterritorial* Steiner takes up the theme of the death of the novel, its exhaustion as a form of art. He states, "Like many of the institutions and formal presences which it articulates, the novel will

30 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

31 William Gass, *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (Boston: Nonpareil Books, 1971), p. 118.

32 George Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature and the Inhuman* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), pp. 13,14.

have a considerable afterlife; a nostalgic or parodistic animation may continue. But the vitality of expressive need is largely gone."³³ In his well-known essay on the entropic destiny of the novel as form, entitled "The Literature of Exhaustion," John Barth interprets the fictions of Borges as "not only footnotes to imaginary texts, but postscripts to the real corpus of literature." Barth posits, "This premise gives resonance and relation to all his principal images. The facing mirrors that recur in his stories are a dual *regressus*. The doubles that his characters, like Nabokov's, run afoul of suggest dizzying multiples and remind one of Browne's remark that 'every man is not only himself ... men are lived over again.'"³⁴ In

33 George Steiner, *Extraterritorial: Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1972), p. 173.

34 John Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion," in *On Contemporary Literature*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Avon Books, 1969), p. 672. In an article about postmodernist fiction published in January 1980, Barth reconsiders this "much-misread essay." He points out, "What my essay 'The Literature of Exhaustion,' was really about, so it seems to me now, was the effective 'exhaustion' not of language or of literature but of the aesthetic of high modernism: that admirable, not-to-be-repudiated, but essentially completed, 'program' of what Hugh Kenner has dubbed 'the Pound era.' In 1966/67 we scarcely had the term *postmodernism* in its current literary-critical usage ... but a number of us ... were already well into the working out, not of the next-best thing after modernism, but of the *best next* thing: what is gropingly now called postmodernist fiction; what I hope might also be thought of one day as a literature of replenishment." See John Barth, "The Literature of Replenishment: Postmodernist Fiction," in *The Atlantic*, Volume 245, Number 1 (January 1980), pp. 65-71.

much the same vein, both Harold Rosenberg in *The Tradition of the New* and Irving Howe in *Decline of the New* explore the decay of the vitality and conventions of Modernism.³⁵ Howe postulates, in an application valid for ludic fiction, that "Just as in the verse of Swinburne echoes of Romanticism sag through the stanzas, so in much current writing there is indeed a continuity with modernism, but a continuity of grotesque and parody, through the doubles of fashion."³⁶ In an exciting study on *Literature and Negation*, Kurrik articulates about Robbe-Grillet what stands as a central concern and the omnipresent liability of ludic fiction:

Robbe-Grillet writes in a new time of deletion, a time of the surface sentence. The surface sentence, liberated from dialectical thought, has forgotten its need for knowledge and its relation to the real subject and object. It has also forgotten what was once the deeper significance of repetition (sameness) and difference -- the need for affirmation, synthesis, gathering together, and the need as well for negation, division, tearing asunder. The surface sentence is separated from the deep structure or form of affirmation by a deletion that is a radicalized no, a will only for stylistic elegance and simplicity. Deletion bypasses the corruption both of our yesses and noes. It no longer knows anything about that negation which was sin....

35 Harold Rosenberg, *The Tradition of the New* (New York: Horizon Press, 1959). Rosenberg's study is a seminal contribution; he speaks of the "creative absurdities" of the new as it becomes a tradition.

36 Irving Howe, *Decline of the New* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970), pp. 259-60.

It also knows nothing about affirmation or virtue.... It knows nothing about either because it emerges not from consciousness as such but from the activity and possibilities of writing. Upon the written, deletion acts with as absolute and as total a force as negativity had upon what is thought, but its consequences are disappointing: a surface form of meaningless, albeit exciting, dispersions and condensations. This surface form brings to a closure the classical novel of consciousness, dominated by the aesthetics of negation. In the postmodern novel inspired by deletion, negation and affirmation must submit to being merely momentary content in a form governed by an aesthetics of deletion.³⁷

In the face of powerful opposing criticism, all is yet not lost for ludic fiction. Nabokov in *Lolita*, Pynchon in *The Crying of Lot 49, V.*, and *Gravity's Rainbow* probe dialectical consciousness. Pynchon confronts most fully the spectre of alienation and loss in society. Borges is boldly defended from the most intransigent critical perspective of Graff since the Argentine writer retains a strong sense of negation. Graff demonstrates, moreover, that in Borges's stories the "condition of imprisonment ... is presented from a tragic or tragicomic point of view that forces us to see it as a problem.... His work affirms the sense of reality in a negative way by dramatizing its absence as a deprivation."³⁸ In a similar vein, Coover mocks

37 Maire Jaanus Kurrik, *Literature and Negation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 235.

38 Graff, *Literature Against Itself*, pp. 55-6.

popular culture as he simultaneously suggests the higher creative realm of human consciousness capable of conferring an unalienated relationship between man and society.

Gass has commented in a statement cogent for ludic fiction generally that, "A number of our finest writers -- Barth, Coover, and Barthelme, for example -- have begun to experiment with shorter forms, ... to instruct us in the art of narration, the myth-making imagination. The regions they have begun to develop are emphatically not like the decaying South, the Great Plains, or the Lower East Side; they are rather regions of the mind ..."³⁹

Pynchon offers a picture of society which is highly critical of contemporary American life, which condemns the mechanized, plastic world and the oppressions of the industrial work force. He presents a vision of entropy lurking in the garden of Californian suburbia and he articulates the possibility of consciousness to create another, freer vision for the social individual. Coover also describes life overwhelmed by artificial mechanisms of control, by the corporation denying the liberty of the worker, by the continual drudgery of alienated labour. Nabokov delineates the manipulative ideology of the American dream, the crassness of a conformist society, the destructive selfishness of artistic solipsism. He

39 Gass, *Fiction and the Figures of Life*, p. 107.

adumbrates cultural artifacts and a landscape of great beauty and also of barrenness. Borges tells of the mythic conflicts of peasants, of the gaucho experience. Fowles reveals much of the English class system and of snobberies of accent and education. John Barth presents the social and emotional problems of adolescence. He also articulates the contradictions inherent in the controlling epistemology of a nation.

In *Lolita*, Nabokov discusses his role as that of an illusionist and a conjuror or magus, and in correspondence with Edmund Wilson he also projects this image of the artist as a magician with words.⁴⁰ For Fowles, Coover, and Pynchon, the absorption with verbal tricks, with scintillant language, with elaborate and humorous conceits, conveys the dominance of the word as the means and product of fiction. Fogel has explained that "What is involved here is a radical shift in epistemology which calls into question the traditional use of prosaic language as a window onto the world."⁴¹ Schulz postulates that "if all novels are parodies of something else -- either the raw data of experience, dreams, reconstructed memories, or concepts of the mind -- then the truest and most interesting novels

40 Vladimir Nabokov and Edmund Wilson, *The Nabokov-Wilson Letters: Correspondence Between Vladimir Nabokov and Edmund Wilson, 1940-1971*, ed. and introd. Simon Karlinsky (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), pp. 131, 177.

41 Stanley Fogel, "'And all the little typtopies': Notes on Language Theory in the Contemporary Experimental Novel," *Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 20, Number 3 (Autumn 1974), p. 328.

will be those that frankly parody and ingenuously admit their artifice (in the same way as Cezanne and the Cubist painters rejected perspective in favor of admitting that a picture consists of paint on a canvas surface)."⁴²

This study necessarily must scrutinize the patterns of images set out by the Edenic thrust of ludic fiction. We must examine images of the garden, of the child's primal world, of Arcadia, of magic, of youth, innocence, bliss, timelessness, and their contradictory counterparts in mechanization, decay, destruction, entropy, illusions, temporality, and death. Through the close textual scrutiny of these fictions, we realize the controlling vision of a mental apocalypse, the flow of consciousness toward freedom. We are reminded of a similar conclusion by Lewis, specifically about the millennial vision of Hart Crane: "*The Bridge* (1930) is the very type of the apocalypse of imagination: a poem written out of a deepening despair over the conditions of life in America, but a poem which ... aims nonetheless at establishing a new relationship between the human consciousness and that life ..."⁴³ Hegel

42 Max F. Schulz, "Characters (Contra Characterization) in the Contemporary Novel," in *The Theory of the Novel: New Essays*, ed. John Halperin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 145.

43 R.W.B. Lewis, *Trials of the World: Essays in American Literature and the Humanistic Tradition* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 202.

lends credence to this aesthetic quest of postlapsarian man in pursuing the freedom of consciousness when, in the *Logic*, he uses the Edenic myth itself as an introduction to the exploration of the infinite world of mind. He argues, "The final concord [of fallen man] then is spiritual; that is, the principle of restoration is found in thought, and thought only."⁴⁴

In an excellent analysis of self-reflexive fiction, Robert Alter has noted the crucial importance of contradiction and the "quixotic tension between what is fictional and what is real."⁴⁵ This tension generates the success of ludic fiction's transcendent aims, for the word recovers meaning as a countersign to the exhaustion of artifice through the dialectical restoration of history and time and concrete referentiality. Alter argues, "Perhaps the most reliable index to whether a piece of self-conscious fiction is closed off from life is whether it tends to diminish the actuality of personal and historical time."⁴⁶ The reentry into history, culture, and society signals the emergence of

44 G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Logic, Being Part One of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830), trans. William Wallace, foreword by J.N. Findlay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975; rpt. 1978), p. 43.

45 Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1975), p. 224.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 232.

language and linguistic play into enduring art as an element of human consciousness, hence as part of the real life of the individual. Emerson's and Royce's visions of a new, self-created relationship to the universe are transformed in ludic fiction from the American Eden to the Edenic possibilities of consciousness.

CHAPTER THREE

Nabokov's *Lolita*: A Last Mirage of Wonder

And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here, that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes -- a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

Lolita recaptures the movement of Gatsby's wasteland.

The last mirage of wonder becomes a corrupt, barren landscape rendered through the frail musings of a pervert. Nabokov toys with the idea of aesthetic consummation as Humbert plays with the caprices of a lonely, coy, confused adolescent. *Lolita* presents the American Eden as oxymoron, a failed yet potent material hope which Nabokov parodies on two levels, the social and the artistic. American society undergoes a harsh scrutiny; a culture of book clubs, finishing schools, and anti-intellectual academe is explored and ridiculed. As Humbert drives across America, the nation stands revealed. What is powerful and exciting about Nabokov's artistic

revelation is the brilliant delineation of a culture and a society by the use of a few key images and motifs. The billboard, the advertising slogan, project a terse significance reminiscent of the giant eyes of Doctor T.J. Eckleburg on the optician's probing billboard in *The Great Gatsby*, and equally as effective a symbol. Humbert's peripatetic travels across America trace the pattern of westward settlement and exploration which our ancestors pursued in search of their equally elusive Edenic quest. The difference between Humbert and the early settlers is not in their capacity for wonder, for Humbert in many ways does perceive America as a land of promise and wonder. But the conflict between the green hope and the more difficult reality consumes the consciousness of Nabokov's protagonist in a way, we may assume, that it did not dominate the perceptions of those seeking, and finding, a virgin territory, instead of motels with neon lights, and hamburger chains.

If Humbert's sense of wonder is betrayed by the land he adopts, the discovery of fulfillment is not denied him. Lolita sparks the discovery; she is the fulfillment of Humbert's capacity for wonder, of his strange version of the American dream. Lolita, perfect girl-child that she is, articulates the vision of Humbert's Eden, and for him she encapsulates the quintessence of paradise. The blonde nymphet embodies the lavish promise and desire for which Humbert longs. She is the physical ideal of Eve, the

first woman become contemporary gum-chewing American. Here the fundamental word is "ideal," for it is as a mental conceptualization more than a concrete adolescent that Lolita figures as the central interest of the novel.

Humbert is more concerned with consciousness and art than with life. He sees the Edenic myth as a mental and aesthetic pursuit. Words and images predicate the nature of the Eden he adumbrates. Humbert "safely solipsizes" Lolita from the beginning. In fact, it would not be amiss to state that the American girl-child is a figment of Humbert's imagination, in the Hegelian sense of consciousness determining the pattern of any external reality which may exist. Nabokov has skilfully transferred the notion of the American Eden from geography to epistemology. Humbert's thought framework triggers off the idea of Lolita; the actual Lolita is incidental to the original ideal which has been present in Humbert since the days of his youth. However, the ideal cannot be sustained if there is no external reference to promote it and to give rise to the specific expression it conveys. Art and life, consciousness and reality, are thus in this novel reciprocal and interdependent forces, acting upon and forming each other in the way Hegel described.

Yet many critics confront the solipsism of Humbert as a primary limitation of Nabokov's art. They decry the aesthetic apotheosis of a sick man as consummate artist and question the moral landscape the author promotes.

They demonstrate the death and destruction caused by Humbert's quest, the sheer evil of destroying an unprotected child. If we accept Humbert's vision of Lolita as a ghost of her former self after the inception of their coital relationship, as a sad, lonely child who cries mutely into the mirrors of cheap motels, then it is difficult not to controvert the methods and goals of this novel. The ludic landscape becomes an authentic prison for Mrs. Haze, for Lolita, for Quilty, and for Humbert; it is not at any point a real garden or an essence of freedom. Humbert denies freedom; he does not create it. His egotistical violence counteracts any humanity conferred by the character's palpable *angst*. Thus, for many readers Humbert portrays the ignominy of the child abuser rather than the delightful patrimony of poetic creation. His own reiterated defensiveness simply echoes an abject culpability. The love for Lolita represents more solipsistic auto-eroticism than paradisaic unity. With Lolita Humbert replicates the exploitative element of the American Eden, that fervour for making over natural wonder into entrapped artifice or mechanized myth, the passion for change and possession which becomes an obsession and a nemesis.

It is hard for readers to exalt in the cruelty of Humbert's games despite the compelling rhetoric. The naïve reader may be horrified without grasping the subtleties of Nabokov's art. The literary audience may be just as eager to translate every innuendo of molestation and

inhumanity to the level of metaphor and gamesmanship, thereby averting any discussion of outrage or moral disgust. A third possibility is to accept the fictive nature of the story as given, but also to wonder at the method of Nabokov's craft. It is unlikely that Nabokov wishes us to see the victim Lolita as the author of her own suffering, as an adolescent enchantress and rank manipulator. The powerful vision of her person missing from the concord of children at play works against such ultimate depiction. Nabokov exploits sympathy for Lolita, for her childish helplessness as the antinomy of Humbert's fear of her calculated rejection. Humbert is saved or redeemed only by the superimposition of Nabokov's power of language upon his seedy reminiscences. The artist Nabokov glorifies is Nabokov; Humbert assumes a pathetic demeanour any way we envision him. He is not Dante or Petrarch and his acute lack of judgement and dearth of artistry are amplified through such comparisons. Humbert dies. Nabokov uses the prop of the posthumous publication as vindication of aesthetic process not elevation of the artist manqué or the dispossessed lover. As he has himself articulated, the subject of Lolita is words, the artist's love affair with the English language. Humbert is as horrible as his detractors claim. Nabokov's ludic gift demonstrates the creative potency of words to expel the destructive capability, through the durable pigments of the Edenic projection of mind. There is no mysterious, mystical

pivot at which Humbert ceases to be pervert and snaps into his artistic mantle. The aesthetic consciousness which moves us is Nabokov's.

Nabokov makes no attempt positively to promote the delusions of a pervert and madman. Readers troubled by such a statement need to distinguish between the narrative persona and the artistic creator, to separate the substance of fiction from its chosen vehicle. The author does show us an art which transcends baseness and insanity with the halcyon rectitude of the Edenic imagination. What Nabokov commits to memory are words, simply words on the printed page. He amplifies the power of the language by contrasting the prose with the fervent fantasies of a grotesque figure. The method may be clarified by placing it within the framework of postmodernist mannerism. Merivale points out that "both Borges and Nabokov exploit, for their own thematic purposes, all the narrative tricks and devices of the Gothic fantasy writers of the last two centuries, and they blend mannerism and Gothicism together in their single most important parodic pattern, the metaphysical detective story."¹ The obviously grotesque and mannered characterizations of Humbert and Quilty serve to delineate the transforming process of words, of the temporary refuge of the Edenic landscape.

Nabokov takes the idea of America as Eden, and he

¹ Patricia Merivale, "The Flaunting of Artifice in Vladimir Nabokov and Jorge Luis Borges," in *Nabokov: The Man and His Work*, ed. L.S. Dembo (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), p. 210.

stresses the core significance of the ideational framework and the verbal Eden it engenders. Unlike the physical pattern of America as a place of Edenic possibility, the self-contained universe of the conceptualized, idealized Eden is a fairly obtrusive concern, which requires a high degree of awareness on the part of author and audience. Usually as well, within the novel the protagonist is self-consciously knowledgeable of his role as a creator and myth-maker. Humbert pre-eminently forms his sense of self on this basis. He sees himself as the bearer of an idea, the only idea in which he can live, that of a nostalgic Eden typified by the image of a blonde girl-child. The physical reality of his relationship with Lolita can only be a feeble attempt to reclaim a mental impression. Lolita is more an entity of the memory and desire of Humbert than she is the actuality of its embodiment:

Lolita had been safely solipsized. The implied sun pulsated in the supplied poplars; we were fantastically and divinely alone; I watched her, rosy, gold-dusted, beyond the veil of my controlled delight, unaware of it, alien to it, and the sun was on her lips, and her lips were apparently still forming the words of the Carmen-barmen ditty that no longer reached my consciousness ...

... I felt proud of myself. I had stolen the honey of a spasm without impairing the morals of a minor. Absolutely no harm done. The conjuror had poured milk, molasses, foaming champagne into a young lady's new white purse; and low, the purse was intact. Thus I had delicately constructed my ignoble, ardent, sinful dream; and still Lolita was safe - and I was safe. What I had madly possessed was not she, but my own creation, another fanciful Lolita - perhaps, more real than Lolita; overlapping, encasing her; floating between me and her, and having no will, no consciousness

- indeed, no life of her own.

The child knew nothing. I had done nothing to her. And nothing prevented me from repeating a performance that affected her as little as if she were a photographic image rippling upon a screen and I, a humble hunchback abusing myself in the dark.

Inasmuch as Lolita conforms to a pre-established pattern of Humbert's mind, her reality exists in that mind and never leaves it. From the beginning of the novel it is clear that Lolita is a product of Humbert's art. His passion for her is largely an aesthetic one; it has existed, in essence, before Lolita herself was conceived and long after she is gone. Thus Humbert is foremost aware of himself as artist and manipulator, and the reader is meant to see Lolita's true existence as a creature of Humbert's imagination. The Eve and Eden we perceive are fully created and art is a conscious pursuit. The *idea* of Lolita is the supreme fiction.

After the parodic grounding of the "Foreword" in a spurious and amusing reality, the novel itself exists in a constant emphasis of its fictionality. The opening chapter lends an excellent example of this dynamic. It begins with a lyrical paean to Lolita: "Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth, Lo. Lee. Ta" (p. 11).

2 Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (New York: Berkley Press, 1966), pp. 57, 59. All future references are to this edition and will appear in parentheses.

The emphasis of this initial statement is on a word, "Lolita". The verbal aspect of Humbert's obsession is nicely conjured by the rhythmic quality of the pronunciation of the name. It is important to note that it is as a word that Lolita is first introduced, for this heralds the pattern of her existence as a created entity within the make-up of the lexical Eden. Humbert might have recalled the softness of Lolita's skin or the vibrancy of her smile or the beauty of her body at motion in a game of tennis. But instead he has chosen to recollect a syllabic impression of a spondaic sound. The word dominates over the person, and this demonstrates the crucial significance of the word and hence the creation in Humbert's mind of an Edenic ideal called "Lolita".

The second paragraph, while seeming to underscore the physical reality of an American adolescent by describing concrete facts about her height and apparel, paradoxically undercuts this by a continued emphasis on the nominative import of one protean word. This paragraph also renders the essence of Humbert's creative powers by letting us know that no matter what the outward transformation of the girl, she had always an artistic, imagined stability for Humbert. Whatever the external reality, the internal meaning is independent of it and a self-promoting constant. Lolita is safe forever as an idea in Humbert's mind, a passion in his soul, an eternalized product of art, never to fade or die or lose

her "nymphancy".

If the first two paragraphs are not ^{a/}blatant enough _{b/} an announcement of Humbert's artistic quest achieved through locating an idea in the clothes and person of a nymphet, then the third paragraph serves to dispel any final reservations about the fiction of the fiction we are reading. Here the emphasis is on the power of memory to instil an Eden, and on the capability of art to locate and preserve the initial Adamic experience: "In point of fact, there might have been no Lolita at all had I not loved, one summer, a certain initial girl-child. In a pryncedom by the sea" (p. 11). The paradisaical essence of this recollected summer crystallizes in the poetic rendering, so that the poetic rendering itself is transposed as the source of further artistic expression. This is evident by the hybridity of Lolita; she is based on Humbert's childhood love and drawn from his parodic consciousness of the poem of Edgar Allan Poe, "Annabel Lee". The nature of Lolita as American adolescent is grafted from the Edenic imagination. It would be impossible for an intelligent American reader not to recognize the allusion to Poe almost immediately. These lines from Poe are paraphrased in the opening chapter and continue to reverberate throughout the novel, bringing the reader back from reality and drawing him to the circle of art:

"She was a child and I was a child,
 In this kingdom by the sea,
 But we loved with a love that was more than love --

I and my Annabel Lee --
 With a love that the winged seraphs of Heaven
 Coveted her and me."³

Not only does Nabokov ground his work of art in art by means of the Poe allusion, but also he merges his art with the theme of play. Through a sense of parodic amusement he establishes a comic undercurrent which flows throughout the fiction. He counterposes the tautness of a tale of passion and perversion against a comic background.

The play element within the opening chapter is apparent on another level, the level on which *Lolita* may be perceived as describing a child's world of play and freedom. The childhood state contains a necessary key to any later attainment or re-creation of primal bliss. Its hallmark is sensuous gratification and a freedom of imagination. Hence it is important to recall Poe's lines, "She was a child and I was a child". A regressive concept dominates the notion of Edenic fiction. Both Humbert and Quilty seek Lolita as much for their own pursuit of the freedom and play of childhood, as for her beauty and appeal. Humbert repeats and emphasizes the importance for a nymphet still to be within the bounds of childhood. Full development into womanhood is anathema for a nymph. Childhood, then, occupies a central symbolic value, and it is noteworthy that childhood signifies for man a world of play and of infinite possibilities.

3 Edgar Allan Poe, "Annabel Lee" in *The Penguin Book of American Verse*, ed. Geoffrey Moore (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1977), pp. 111-12.

The freedom most adults feel denied they associate with the ludic realm of children.

By prevalent use of the childhood motif throughout the novel, Nabokov suggests the central cohesion this element lends to the concept of the Edenic creation, and the indispensable meaning to be retrieved from the experience of childhood. The evocative image of children at play generates a major emphasis at the beginning and end of the novel. On the first page the reference to "a certain initial girl-child" and the allusion to Poe contribute, as we have already seen, to the primal Edenic feeling of the artist as Adam in a world of play. At the conclusion of Humbert's narrative, as he is a cornered man waiting to be arrested and carried away to prison, there is the brilliant, moving image of the pastoral scene in the valley below, an image so powerful that it cancels, for a moment, the crimes and evils of Humbert's life. The rendering of the scene is a lyrical reminder of the poet's Adamic quest and its realization in his art:

And while I was waiting for them to run up to me on the high slope, I evoked a last mirage of wonder and hopelessness ... of asters bathing in the detached warmth of a pale blue afternoon in late summer ... Small grasshoppers spurted out of the withered roadside weeds ... As I approached the friendly abyss, I grew aware of the melodious unity of sounds rising like vapor from a small mining town that lay at my feet, in a fold of the valley ... And soon I realized that all these sounds were of one nature, that no other sounds but these came from the streets of the transparent town,

with the women at home and the men away. Reader! What I heard was but the melody of children at play, nothing but that, and so limpid was the air that within this vapor of blended voices, majestic and minute, remote and magically near, frank and divinely enigmatic - one could hear now and then, as if released, an almost articulate spurt of vivid laughter, or the crack of a bat, or the clatter of a toy wagon, but it was all really too far for the eye to distinguish any movement in the lightly etched streets. I stood listening to that musical vibration from my lofty slope, to those flashes of separate cries with a kind of demure murmur for background, and then I knew that the hopelessly poignant thing was not Lolita's absence from my side, but the absence of her voice from that concord (pp. 279-80).

Childhood and the experiences of childhood engender the only sort of actual unity and perfection postlapsarian man may know. It is the task of the artist, then, to recapture the unity of childhood in the higher level of synthesis in art through adult perception. This may be a regressive step for Humbert, but for Nabokov it is a progressive attainment. The child's world contains an Eden forbidden outside its realm, and to regain the child's world is to approach paradise. Art must have the freshness, unity, and freedom possessed by the child at play. Abrams notes "an equation, implicit or overt, between the infancy of the individual and the condition of Adam in Eden, so that to restore the fresh and wondering vision of the child is to recover the pristine experience of paradise".⁴

⁴ M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 380.

Nabokov dwells at length, in both *Lolita* and *Ada*, on the life of the child, and the freshness and beauty which appertain to it. It is the function of art to build for all men a universe of freedom and play, modelled on that of the child, while advanced in art as the only Edenic realm available, a temporary paradise in which to live. In Nabokov's credo, art remains the last wilderness where men can achieve a new relationship with the universe. There are no more continents to discover. America betrayed its Edenic potential long ago. Yet the mind can still attain an Eden, where man gains a fresh relationship with himself and with nature, where man is free and the possibilities are limitless. For Nabokov, as for the other writers in this analysis, the pastoral of Eden takes shape in the landscape of the mind, a fertile region to nurture the freedom and play of the child reborn as an adult Adam.

Through Annabel and through *Lolita*, Humbert seeks and finds the unity and freedom he enjoyed as a child in the protected environment of the Hotel Mirana, "a kind of private universe, a whitewashed cosmos within the blue greater one that blazed outside" (pp. 12-13). What Humbert remembers of his infancy and of his mother are vague evocations of the primal bliss in an Edenic setting, a happiness which the nymphet alone is capable of rekindling: "those redolent remnants of day-suspended, with the midges, about some hedge in bloom or suddenly

entered and traversed by the rambler, at the bottom of a hill, in the summer dusk; a furry warmth, golden midges" (p. 12). Yet the plenary bliss of childhood is denied Humbert, for the death of his mother and more significantly, of his beloved Annabel, curtail the freshness, wonder, and hope of his primal paradise, and cause him to seek an atavistic recapitulation through the obsessive pursuit of nymphets.

This regressive need for a primal unity dominates Humbert's later emotional life, and the child or nymphet becomes central to the quest for a paradisaical state as both a symbol and the actuality of its attainment. The child's world of play delineates the landscape and properties of Eden. Thus Humbert's search for the nymphet is the enactment of his desire for the freedom and gratification of the original garden. Humbert is Adam in quest of the primal Eve-child. His imagination bequeaths a created, albeit unrealized, paradise:

How marvelous were my fancied adventures as I sat on a hard park bench pretending to be immersed in a trembling book. Around the quiet scholar, nymphets played freely, as if he were a familiar statue or part of an old tree's shadow and sheen. Once a perfect little beauty in a tartan frock, with a clatter put her heavily armed foot near me upon the bench to dip her slim bare arms into me and tighten the strap of her roller skate, and I dissolved in the sun, with my book for fig leaf, as her auburn ringlets fell all over her skinned knee, and the shadow of leaves I shared pulsed and melted on her radiant limb next to my chameleonic cheek ...

Rope-skipping, hopscotch. That old woman

in black who sat next to me on my bench, on my rack of joy (a nymphet was groping under me for a lost marble), and asked if I had a stomachache, the insolent hag. Ah, leave me alone in my pubescent park, in my mossy garden. Let them play around me forever. Never grow up (pp. 21-22).

The constant reiterated image of "pale pubescent girls" (p. 18) evokes for Humbert the delights of a child's paradise, a re-creation of the primordial ideal. Once the nymphet reaches the threshold of womanhood, she is no longer fertile territory for the erotic imaginings of Humbert. The protagonist acknowledges that he is talking about a sort of prolonged childhood held in abeyance for, from his point of view, the exclusive cultivation of perverse adult males: "It will be marked that I substitute time terms for spatial ones. In fact, I would have the reader see 'nine' and 'fourteen' as the boundaries - the mirrory beaches and rosy rocks - of an enchanted island haunted by those nymphets of mine and surrounded by a vast, misty sea" (p. 18). Humbert dwells at length on the nuances of nymphetry, "the ineffable signs" (p. 19). He makes this irrational pursuit and selection seem quite rational. Yet the reader is left to reflect that the choice seems as arbitrary as that of a child picking one piece of ribbon-candy over another. Age and eroticism are the primary ingredients of Humbert's choices. However, the lack of sophistication and the innocent, naïve, childlike demeanour with which Lolita is endowed, are qualities Humbert cannot do without.

Lolita is as crude as any uninhibited, unself-conscious child might be. She has the lack of discrimination of the playful child: "Mentally, I found her to be a disgustingly conventional little girl. Sweet hot jazz, square dancing, gooey fudge sundaes, musicals, movie magazines and so forth - these were the obvious items in her list of beloved things" (p. 136). Perhaps the reason why Nabokov spends so much narrative time on the childish fancies of Lolita is to make explicit the importance of the mental as well as physical attributes of her childhood. To be a child is to want pure and immediate gratification, to live in a free primal state. Rather than Lolita's various repulsive proclivities being counter to an Edenic evocation, they are thus essential to it. Lolita's worthless trinkets are the artifacts of Humbert's priceless Eden, and they also serve dialectically to amplify the tawdriness of his ostensibly idyllic quest.

The elaborate cataloguing of the clothes and toys of Lolita represents a paean to childhood as much as it reflects the transcendent power of the imagination. Like Wordsworth, Nabokov is capable of transforming the lowest, most ordinary experience or object into the realm of beauty and art. Bobby socks and blaring records have never before conveyed such poignancy nor have they previously described the palpable potentiality of the fictional imagination. By the presentation of the accoutrements and objects surrounding the girlhood of

Lolita, Nabokov heightens the poignancy of Humbert's quest to maintain the child as an eternal nymph. Perhaps the underlying reason Humbert showers Lolita with gifts and luxuries is to contribute to and elongate the period of her play world, as much as it is to bribe her into compliance and submission. The desperate quality of his compulsive buying of toys, books, and trinkets is symbolic of Humbert's frantic search for his own lost childhood, for the freedom and play he can now only re-create in the realm of the mind. The plight is critical, for if Humbert cannot satisfy and enlarge the ludic element of Lolita's life, he cannot preserve his position in it and its position in his imagination. Humbert thus instinctively realizes that he must encourage the child in Lolita, and he goes about it with a frenetic zeal which claims much poignancy, in addition to the frivolity and ludicrousness which his attempt also entails. Lolita is plied with bicycle and tennis racquet, dresses and slacks, candies and ice cream, movie magazines and comic books. Humbert indulges her every childish whim and their drive across America represents the bizarre gratification of her puerile impulses.

In a fine integration of the American scene with the passionate conatus of an obsessed pervert questing after apocalyptic fulfillment, Nabokov details the path of Humbert and Lolita through a wry exposure of the American pastoral. As the nugatory attempts to satisfy the playful

desires of a frivolous child guide Humbert on his way, he tries hard to make America into an Eden she will remember: "By putting the geography of the United States into motion, I did my best for hours on end to give her the impression of 'going places,' of rolling on to some definite destination, to some unusual delight" (p. 139).

But to engage the child is more arduous than composing an Eden in the mind. Lolita is an obdurate subject; she refuses to pay attention to the landscape; an object of gratification must be directly before her before she will consider it. To keep his Eden Humbert must pacify this nymphet at every turn in the road. Her protean play impulse propels him across the highways of a continent. An irony develops, for as Lolita becomes the realization of Eve and Eden for the protagonist, she lives for him mainly as a mental image. Moreover, the American landscape disappoints Humbert's child-concept of the verdant paradise. Its antithetical aspect of machine-eroded pasture comes into play for him. Once again, however, the mental Eden asserts itself over the outward reality. The mind fashions nature to fit its own demands. Thus America, like Lolita, becomes the stereotype of Humbert's childhood fantasy, regardless of the obvious external reality. It is interesting to note how the pervasive notion of "the middle landscape,"⁵ that

⁵ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 23, 71.

hallowed ground midway between wilderness and mechanized civilization, prevails in the immigrant's dream:

By a paradox of pictorial thought, the average lowland North American countryside had at first seemed to me something I accepted with a shock of amused recognition because of those painted oilcloths which were imported from America in the old days to be hung above washstands in Central-European nurseries, and which fascinated a drowsy child at bed time with the rustic green views they depicted - opaque curly trees, a barn, cattle, a brook, the dull white of vague orchards in bloom, and perhaps a stone fence or hills of greenish gouache. But gradually the models of those elementary rusticities became stranger and stranger to the eye, the nearer I came to know them. Beyond the tilled plain, beyond the toy roofs, there would be a slow suffusion of inutile loveliness, a low sun in a platinum haze with a warm, peeled-peach tinge pervading the upper edge of a two-dimensional, dove-gray cloud fusing with the distant amorous mist (pp. 139-40).

But if the landscape of America yields some reminder of pastoral glory, or some harmony of natural setting, Humbert is not able to enjoy the vision of such an Eden any more than he can enjoy for long the pleasures of Lolita. The reality of both remain firmly lodged in the mind even as they disappear from their putative apotheoses. The ludic instinct in Lolita persists as a drive to buy and to consume and her diversions determine a less colourful path of travel, one that appeases a child's amusement with roadside toilet signs and "junk" food. The play mood thus contributes an itinerary of its own, even before the cryptogrammic game with Quilty begins.

Play is properly defined as without meaning beyond the limited world it creates and as possessing an

absorption unto itself. It casts a temporary spell around those who participate in it, with a transforming power to leave behind the real world as its universe takes over. Play has a time and space unique to its creation, and rules of behaviour to perpetuate the game to a conclusion. As Huizinga observes, "Play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits ..., according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is 'different' from 'ordinary life'. Thus defined, the concept seemed capable of embracing everything we call 'play' in animals, children and grown-ups: games of strength and skill, inventing games, guessing games, games of chance, exhibitions and performances of all kinds."⁶ Although adults play, play *per se* is seen as the natural realm of children.

The play element in *Lolita* reinforces Nabokov's theme of aesthetic idealism. The drive across America represents a mental sojourn as well as the ludic challenge offered through the elaborate verbal games with Quilty. In all of this, Humbert desperately seeks the play world of his childhood. Despite the trash cans, gasoline stations, lollipop wrappers, and the general

⁶ J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949), p. 28.

debris of life in contemporary, consumer-oriented America, Humbert retains his mythic dream of pastoral loveliness, always perceiving greenness instead of metal, always playing with the artist's dream. As for Lolita, she sees in the metal, the signs, the candy wrappers a world of play and her ideal of Eden:

Now and then, in the vastness of those plains, huge trees would advance toward us to cluster self-consciously by the roadside and provide a bit of humanitarian shade above a picnic table, with sun flecks, flattened paper cups, samaras and discarded ice-cream sticks littering the brown ground. A great user of roadside facilities, my unfastidious Lo would be charmed by toilet signs - Guys-Gals, John-Jane, Jack-Jill and even Buck's-Doe's; while lost in an artist's dream, I would stare at the honest brightness of the gasoline paraphernalia against the splendid green of oaks, or at a distant hill scrambling out - scarred but still untamed - from the wilderness of agriculture that was trying to swallow it (p. 140).

It is only while appeasing the child in adventurous play that Humbert can approach the gap between himself and Lolita, that "thirty million years ago when I was a child" (p. 144).⁷ The image of children's voices at play at the end of *Lolita* contains a sadness, a sense of pain heightened for Humbert because he denied Lolita the appeasement of normal play with her peers. It is his tragedy that he can never attain a state of Edenic play

7 The poetics of *Lolita*'s play and its connection with Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* has been discussed by Alfred Appel, Jr., in "Tristram in Movielove: *Lolita* at the Movies," in *A Book of Things about Vladimir Nabokov*, ed. Carl R. Proffer (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ardis, 1974), p. 153.

with Lolita. In the real world he remains an outsider beyond the perimeters of unity in ludic action. This is the central *angst* of Humbert's situation, for he is an alien even within the special climate of passionate involvement.

The play realm as Humbert knows it is a falsification of the spirit of freedom it should entail. For Lolita, too, the sham and superficiality of their amusements cause pain and a grave sense of loss. Lolita is racked upon a wheel of ludic torment, as is Humbert. After the physical violation of Lolita, the sense of loss and entrapment becomes pervasive. The child takes on the static, oppressed, deadening qualities of an objectified being totally out of harmony with her inner rhythm and the appropriate, normal social environment. Humbert's attempts at play with Lolita evoke a pathetic, hollow enactment of postlapsarian failure. The function of play is relegated to the imagination because reality is inadequate to it, or rather because Humbert's visions involve the plenary corruption of those norms of behaviour we associate with the real demands of happiness and well-being. The play in which Lolita is bathed is a contrived attempt to rescue a blighted affair from the defeat of time, space, and contemporary mores. Bruss emphasizes the evil of Humbert's oneiric vision and sees his Edenic projections as evidence of pathology, not poetry. She points out the dominance of the protagonist's destructive potential:

Humbert's madness is not really a perverse desire for little girls but a willful attempt to copulate with his own dreams and to murder his own nightmares in his vengeful guilt and disappointment. All the women who become involved with him, save only Rita, are ultimately killed by the effects of his attentions, as though he robbed them of vitality by combining them with his fantasies. Both his first wife and, later, Lolita herself, die in childbirth, as though to indicate the essential and murderous sterility of Humbert's love There is some suggestion that the reformation and change of heart which Humbert undergoes while pondering Lolita in his prison ... is merely an exchange of one delusion for another -- a willed sacrifice of both lover and beloved for the sake of artistic immortality In his memoirs, Humbert hopes to construct a timeless space he may share with his nymphet, a shrine no doubt, but a tomb as well, recalling the necrophiliac closure to the fable with which Humbert began, the tale of Annabel Lee.⁸

Most readers are not so troubled by Humbert's insincerity. We accept the unauthentic nature of the self-professed madman and it is difficult to question his intentions since they are so basically bizarre. Nabokov's full-scale parody militates against such interpretation; the ludic element and ironic tone counteract the tenebrous circle of denial, death, and destruction. The power of play assuages the impact of Humbert's nefarious actions. Yet his games are never able to pierce the palpable world. Merivale postulates that Nabokov "asserts the primacy of 'reality' over insane fantasy In each case reality disrupts fantasy as a mode of action. The heroes are left only with the books they have written, their self-created artifices, for only a lunatic would behave

⁸ Elizabeth W. Bruss, *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 134.

as if the world were his own work of art, would try to make the world book-shaped."⁹

We have explored how Humbert predicates his Eden on the play element and have noted the power of games to sustain and promote this paradise. The overlying control for the preoccupation with play and games is found in the analogous function Nabokov establishes for his fiction. The novel itself is transformed into a self-contained ludic universe, in which aesthetic purpose and meaning come about through a labyrinth of puzzles.

Quilty's cryptogrammic game with Humbert equals Nabokov's game with the reader, and as always the case with Nabokov, there are "only words to play with" (p. 32). The other games in the novel are secondary to those played with words. The Edenic freedom and value common to all play and games occupies a fundamental concern. The aesthetic texture is dominated by the quest for paradisaic perfection and fulfillment represented in microcosm by the well-defined limits of autonomous play.

As we shall see in *The Magus*, the novelist's role in contemporary fiction is that of gamesman, magician, and creator, he who controls an imagined universe by the power of words and the ideas they evoke. The artist possesses the keys to Eden which are moulded from the fabric of games and illusion. Unlike the pattern of the

9 Patricia Merivale, "The Flaunting of Artifice in Vladimir Nabokov and Jorge Luis Borges," in *Nabokov: The Man and His Work*, p. 221.

realistic novel or that of the traditional detective fiction, verisimilitude is not an ethical postulate of the contemporary Edenic play novel. The world of reality is suspended as art and illusion take over. A certain magical sleight of hand by the author sets forward the tricks and rhymes of a cleverly crafted literary game which the reader enters when he picks up *Lolita*. The audience must agree to hold their conventional expectations in abeyance, lending the author the license to create a paradise for the postlapsarian world. By the transforming power of words the author is able to articulate a verbal Eden in which we live for the moment of the fictional experience. Words are the raw material and the product, the beginning and the end of the artistic creation. For within the words are the games and the puzzles, the illusionary inducements of play, what Nabokov has described as the accoutrements of a gifted native tongue: "those apparatuses - the baffling mirror, the black velvet backdrop, the implied associations and traditions - which the native illusionist, frac-tails flying, can magically use to transcend the heritage in his own way."¹⁰

The author as magus is a man in love with language and the manifold nuances and meanings which give rise to a verbal Eden. Nabokov promotes his fiction through the

¹⁰ Vladimir Nabokov, "Vladimir Nabokov on a book entitled *Lolita*," in *Lolita*, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

metaphor of games and tricks. He finds it difficult to talk about *Lolita* without sounding "like a conjurer explaining one trick by performing another."¹¹ Humbert's search for Lolita and Eden and his hunt for Quilty depend on the tricks of language and the chimeras of the mind. That is to say, the plot is dependent on the willed and wily imagination of two perverts, both of whom see themselves and are portrayed as gamesmen. Moreover, they are, as well, both conscious artists. Humbert seeks the solace of a self-propelling Eden and Quilty tries to satisfy Adamic ardour through his plays.

The poetics of play is given its final major expression in the cryptogrammic game between Humbert and Quilty. Each artist is trying to outwit the other, with Eve (and Eden) as the prize, and Eve-Lolita as a player as well. In the process of this game the American continent is turned into a vast game board. The meaning of a place name, of a motel, or of the nomenclatures Quilty scribbles in a register, each is a signification for the pieces of a puzzle Humbert must connect. As the reader is pulled into the game, so he, too, is at play in the novel, competing against author and characters to find a solution first. Yet it is not so much the solution as the process that counts. The means is the goal, in the sense that playing itself forms an essential element in the creative act, and of the Edenic imagination. The fertile regions of the mind are the real boundaries.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 282.

Life exists as it applies to art and otherwise it does not matter. The enigma for these characters is the external world; Quilty has difficulty realizing Humbert has in fact shot him; it all seems to him to be part of a game or a movie set. Humbert encounters insurmountable reluctance in his psyche to acknowledging Lolita's outward reality as an adolescent girl with social and personal needs of her own. This problem is not due to Humbert's lack of concern for his nymphet; rather it proceeds from his complete inability to see her apart from his imagined concept. A solipsism of the mind becomes dominant. Play is the answer for Humbert and Quilty but it leaves Lolita neglected and finally destroyed.

Nabokov's parody is weak in its comprehension of Lolita's destruction. Only as a paeon to Humbert's poetic intensity does the image of the bereft and desolate girl-child attain metaphorical significance. Levine argues that "the major act of his life has been to take away the freedom of Dolly Haze," that Humbert callously "wants to make of her an *objet d'art* for his own shelf."¹² Tekiner demonstrates that "for Humbert art is often the means by which life is transformed, and in this sense his art is a product of his solipsism and is the sole object of his love.... the only love Humbert achieves

¹² Robert T. Levine, "'My Ultraviolet Darling': The Loss of Lolita's Childhood," *Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 25, Number 3 (Autumn 1979), pp. 476-77.

is love for Lolita, a character produced by his scripsistic art."¹³ Merrill postulates that "the novel traces Humbert's attempt to thwart time, then, but also the growth of his awareness that this effort has been both futile and morally criminal, in so far as it has led him to impose his desires on Lolita and thus deprive her of her childhood and her status as an independent being." He does, however, acknowledge that "whether Humbert really achieves this awareness has been much debated."¹⁴ Nabokov's relentless ludic engagements would seem to make any moral focus ultimately ambiguous.

In so far as the American landscape entrances Humbert with its Edenic promise, he suffers equally with Lolita as victim of its raw yet enticing delusions. Humbert's naïve European belief in the potency of the American dream condemns him to an impossible, inevitable postlapsarian despair. That the only Eden to be attained is the process of mind in art confirms the absolute abuse of a mortal, fragile human being for this purpose. Appel avers that "what is extraordinary about *Lolita* is not the presence or

¹³ Christina Tekiner, "Time in *Lolita*," *Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 25, Number 3 (Autumn 1979), p. 469.

¹⁴ Robert Merrill, "Nabokov and Fictional Artifice," *Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 25, Number 3 (Autumn 1979), p. 452.

absence of the author's 'moral position,' but the way in which Nabokov enlists us, against our will, on Humbert's side."¹⁵ Nabokov's symbolic use of the American Eden forces the reader to project himself into Humbert's viewpoint, to share Humbert's romance with words.

The vast landscape of America dominates the fiction, and within and beyond the geographic location is the idea of the eternal, apocalyptic garden, the natural preserve of Eden. If art leads through games to a verbal Eden, then it is critical to perceive how intricately Eden is grounded in the images and motifs of the fictional world. In *Lolita*, the initial garden figures from the beginning of the story as a significant foretaste of the artistic potential of the imagination. The novel is grounded in the milieu of the garden and in the language of Eden.

Lolita is the primal woman, the wife of Adam, Lilith, if not Eve. Humbert sees himself as Adam: "I was as helpless as Adam at the preview of early oriental history, miraged in his apple orchard" (p. 67), and again, "I stood Adam naked" (p. 273). Humbert's repeated adult vision of his long-lost childhood ecstasy is Edenic: "But that mimosa grove - the haze of the stars, the tingle, the flame, the honeydew, and the ache remained with me, and that little girl with her seaside limbs and ardent tongue

¹⁵ Alfred Appel, Jr., "*Lolita*: The Springboard of Parody," in Nabokov: *The Man and His Work*, p. 126.

haunted me ever since" (p. 17). Play and love-making with Annabel in the first garden are transposed into the image of Lolita in the suburban American Ramsdale garden. "The breathless garden" re-enacts the beauty of man's Edenic past and presents the possibilities of a corresponding mental paradise. Indeed, the garden setting of Humbert's first meeting with Lolita is redolent of his pervasive hallucinations of Eden and full of lyrical power. The artistic element elevates imperfect reality. Certainly, a vulgar, gum-chewing, foul-mouthed twelve-year-old never has been spoken of with equal lyrical rapture.

The transforming power of the garden overtakes Humbert's imaginative faculty: "I was still walking behind Mrs. Haze through the dining room when, beyond it, there came a sudden burst of greenery - 'the piazza,' sang out my leader, and then, without the least warning, the blue sea-wave swelled under my heart and, from a mat in a pool of sun, half-naked, kneeling, turning about on her knees, there was my Riviera love peering at me over dark glasses." "'That was my Lo,' she said, 'and these are my lilies'" (pp. 38-39). Constant attention is given to the Edenic motif and its correlates in images of nature, viridity, and fruit. In a later scene, Humbert describes Lolita as holding "in her hollowed hands a beautiful, banal, Eden-red apple" (p. 55). He describes himself as being "like one of those inflated pale spiders you see in old gardens. Sitting in the

middle of a luminous web" (p. 47).

The loss of Lolita becomes felt as "Lo in white shorts receding through the speckled shadow of a garden path" (p. 149). The *angst* that Humbert experiences in Lolita's actual and ultimate unknowableness evokes a dead Eden: "there was in her a garden and a twilight, and a palace gate - dim and adorable regions which happened to be lucidly and absolutely forbidden to me ...". This state and such moments are described by Humbert as "icebergs in paradise" (p. 259). More significant is the emphasis Nabokov gives to the imaginative function of the garden, its ability to engender a mental Eden from the nostalgic softness of a child's play world. Humbert attains a perspicacity in recognizing the creative force of memory:

I find it most difficult to express with adequate force that flash, that shiver, that impact of passionate recognition. In the course of that sun-shot moment that my glance slithered over the kneeling child ... while I passed by her in my adult disguise (a great big handsome hunk of movieland manhood), the vacuum of my soul managed to suck in every detail of her bright beauty, and these I checked against the features of my dead bride. A little later, of course, she, this *nouvelle*, this Lolita, *my* Lolita, was to eclipse completely her prototype. All I want to stress is that my discovery of her was a fatal consequence of that "princedom by the sea" in my tortured past. Everything between the two events was but a series of gropings and blunders, and false rudiments of joy. Everything they shared made one of them (p. 39).

Nature motifs are used by Humbert to clarify his position, both to himself and to his audience, and to

demonstrate the Edenic basis of his quest for Lolita. In relating his obsession, Humbert uses metaphors to emphasize a unity which the nymph gives to his life, a sort of metaphysical union with the world around him: "Mists of tenderness enfolded mountains of longing. Now and then it seemed to me that the enchanted prey was about to meet halfway the enchanted hunter, that her haunch was working its way toward me under the soft sand of a remote and fabulous beach." "The gentle and dreamy regions through which I crept were the patrimonies of poets - *not* crime's prowling ground" (p. 121).

Through union with nature, Humbert comes to know himself and Lolita and to approach the realm of art. Thus any art he produces must be grounded in the poetry of the natural world. Nature reinforces art and art eternalizes nature by capturing the essence of a natural paradise through the created landscape of the imagination. Lolita -- nature's child, Eve, Lilith, Diana -- is properly seen as a natural fiction: "The noncommittal mauve mountains half encircling the town seemed to me to swarm with panting, scrambling, laughing, panting Lolitas who dissolved in their haze" (p. 204). Since the child's natural Adamic universe has predicated Humbert's predisposition for the re-creation of that world in the nymphet, it is apposite that the new Eden of the mind will portray the imagined paradise in the full glory of the primordial universe, a cornucopia of fantasies

and delights. Humbert details his original ecstasy with Lolita as a "bubble of paradise" (p. 73). Defending his heinous behaviour, he pleads, "Please, reader: no matter your exasperation with the tenderhearted, morbidly sensitive, infinitely circumspect hero of my book, do not skip these essential pages! Imagine me; I shall not exist if you do not imagine me; try to discern the doe in me, trembling in the forest of my own iniquity" (p. 119).

The dictum "Imagine me" signifies the protagonist's sensitivity to the creative potential of art, and the self-conscious role that the artist plays within his work. The rest of the sentence confirms Humbert's identification with nature. The language he uses even for the most commonplace statements is impregnated with the aura of a natural world, sometimes sinister, sometimes bright, but always present. And when Humbert describes Lolita, the metaphors applied unite the artist with the iridescent flow of nature and a natural paradise. For example, Humbert recollects that after he had taken Lolita to the hospital, "I lay on her bed that smelled of chestnuts and roses, and peppermint, and the very delicate, very special French perfume" (p. 220).

Several days later he visited her and brought a bouquet "of wild flowers and beautiful leaves gathered with my own hands on a mountain pass at sunrise" (p. 221).

Strangely, Lolita herself is as indifferent to nature as Humbert is absorbed in it; she is a child of

nature but she does not have the artist's gift of perceiving a natural paradise. Yet for Humbert she is, of course, the centre of that paradise. As he merges her with nature through the power of his artistic imagination, her being becomes a lyrical existence. When the artist joins his mind with nature he is capable of the sustaining fiction of Adamic perfection. Lolita thus becomes the poetic product of this synthesis between art and nature:

... I also had her dance for me ... But all that was nothing, absolutely nothing, to the indescribable itch of rapture that her tennis game produced in me - the teasing delirious feeling of teetering on the very brink of unearthly order and splendor.

Despite her advanced age, she was more of a nymphet than ever, with her apricot-colored limbs, in her sub-teen tennis togs! Winged gentlemen! No hereafter is acceptable if it does not produce her as she was then, in that Colorado resort between Snow and Elphinstone, with everything right: the white wide little-boy shorts, the slender waist, the apricot midriff, the white breast-kerchief whose ribbons went up and encircled her neck to end behind in a dangling knot leaving bare her gaspingly young and adorable apricot shoulder blades with that pubescence and those lovely gentle bones, and the smooth, downward-tapering back. Her cap had a white peak. Her racket had cost me a small fortune. Idiot, triple idiot! I could have filmed her! I would have had her now with me, before my eyes, in the projection room of my pain and despair (pp. 210-211).

Humbert is without a film of Lolita, but he has the eternizing power of words to preserve the glory of an Eden that lives in the mind. This is to say, Eden is palpably alive as the re-creation of a new world of

freedom in fiction. It is through art that man rises to the freedom and harmony of his primordial past. In art the sense of the past is alive as a hope for the future of a paradise in the mind. *Lolita* shows us the fulfillment of this potential, the promise of nature completed in poetry, and the ability of fiction to bring nature into contact with its Edenic origin. The sublime transforming power of the art of fiction raises *Lolita* from silly nymphet to the stature of Botticelli's Venus, and elevates Humbert and his love to the level of an immortal artistic tradition, the realm of Dante and Beatrice, Petrarch and Laura. As Humbert is the first to explain, love with a nymphet has an intrinsic other-worldliness; it is not isolated and perverted sexuality, it is paradisaic and artistic bliss. Nabokov attempts to show the unique capability of fiction to regain for man the beauty and freedom of a lost world, to distil a new universe through words.

The formal element is crucial, for without it, chaos reigns and the freedom to play is lost in a morass of incoherence and confusion. Order is the requisite for any aesthetic freedom. Play does not deny order, rather it is born of it, as Marcuse has observed, through the "reconciliation (union) of man and nature in the aesthetic attitude, where order is beauty and work is

play."¹⁶ For Humbert the re-creation of Lolita in art through the power of imagination preserves a freedom otherwise denied by the chaotic demands of his cruel obsession:

What had begun as a delicious distension of my innermost roots became a glowing tingle which now had reached that state of absolute security, confidence and reliance not found elsewhere in conscious life ... I had ceased to be Humbert the Hound, the sad-eyed degenerate cur claspng the boot that would presently kick him away. I was above the tribulations of ridicule, beyond the possibilities of retribution. In my self-made seraglio, I was a radiant and robust Turk, deliberately, in the full consciousness of his freedom, postponing the moment of actually enjoying the youngest and frailest of his slaves. Suspended on the brink of that voluptuous abyss (a nicety of physiological equipoise comparable to certain techniques in the arts) I kept repeating chance words after her - barmen, alarmin', my charmin', my carmen, ahmen, ahahamen - as one talking and laughing in his sleep while my happy hand crept up her sunny leg as far [as] the shadow of decency allowed (p. 57).

The freedom inherent in art equals the experience of play in the natural world. The aesthetic experience re-establishes a new Eden. And as Marcuse has suggested, "This experience, which releases the object into its 'free' being, is the work of the free play of the imagination."¹⁷ The freedom of imagination is the key to *Lolita* and this freedom is preserved in art. In the landscape of the mind, there is still the great promise of the Emersonian dream of a new relationship with nature,

¹⁶ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, with a new preface by the author (London: Sphere Books, 1969), pp. 129-39.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

of a vast green wilderness to be explored and cultivated. Yet the freedom of Humbert's fiction exacts a tremendous price. For him the Edenic quest leads from love to death through great suffering. He cries out in *angst*, "as if the sun had gone out of the game" (p. 217). When he finally locates Lolita, he knows he has lost her forever: "Lo! Lola! Lolita! I hear myself crying from a doorway into the sun, with the acoustics of time, domed time, endowing my call and its tell-tale hoarseness with such a wealth of anxiety, passion and pain that really it would have been instrumental in wrenching open the zipper of her nylon shroud had she been dead. Lolita!" (p. 216).

Humbert loses Lolita at the moment he fully possesses her. He is tortured by his love, and that he loves with all his soul is beyond question: "No matter, even if those eyes of hers would fade to myopic fish, and her nipples swell and crack, and her lovely young velvety delicate delta be tainted and torn - even then I would go mad with tenderness at the mere sight of your dear wan face, at the mere sound of your raucous young voice, my Lolita" (p. 253). An overpowering poignancy is called forth in the realization that Humbert destroys Lolita in his quest for a perfect world, that Lolita should die in the bloom of her youth, and that Humbert expires abjectly in a prison cell:

Alas, I was unable to transcend the simple human fact that whatever spiritual solace I might find, whatever lithophanic eternities

might be provided for me, nothing could make my Lolita forget the foul lust I had inflicted upon her. Unless it can be proven to me - to me as I am now, today, with my heart and my beard, and my putrefaction - that in the infinite run it does not matter a jot that a North American girl-child named Dolores Haze had been deprived of her childhood by a maniac, unless this can be proven (and if it can, then life is a joke), I see nothing for the treatment of my misery but the melancholy and very local palliative of articulate art. To quote an old poet:

The moral sense in mortals is the duty
We have to pay on mortal sense of beauty

(p. 258).

Yet the play of art reconciles memory and desire and as such preserves for man a self-contained, transcendent entity of Edenic fulfillment. As Huizinga has demonstrated about the ludic experience, "Once played, it endures as a new found creation of the mind, a treasure to be retained by the memory. It is transmitted, it becomes tradition. It can be repeated at any time ..."¹⁸ To play in the Eden of art is never to lose the primal harmony of the child's world and the holism of man and nature attained through the mediating promise of the imagination. Humbert begins in a postlapsarian state of tainted mortality and moves to a transcendence of time through the fineness of artistic creation. His solace is that he does have words to play with. For Nabokov, as for Humbert, "There are things that should never be given up" (p. 191). The fiction of *Lolita* is a series of glistening images

¹⁸ Huizinga, pp. 9-10.

and ideas which redeem time, like the *Primavera* of Botticelli, Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, or Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*: "I am thinking of aurochs and angels, the secret of durable pigments, prophetic sonnets, the refuge of art. And this is the only immortality you and I may share, my *Lolita*" (p. 281).

What makes the novel much more than a parody or literary game is the brilliant order of its language fused with the play element in the synthesis of artistic creation. Art is the only realm in which man can approximate the play of Eden. Art is the remembrance of things past as it recaptures the essence of our Adamic universe. The progress of Humbert is from corruption and chaos to a Blakean sort of "organized innocence" in freedom. He moves from lust to love to its Edenic apotheosis in art. As in Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," art is the means of immortalizing the never-to-be-had quality of love in the Golden Age. As Josipovici suggests, the memoir of *Lolita* is "at once the quest and the goal. For the goal is the quest transmuted into language."¹⁹ Elevation into the Edenic state, into a universe of verbal play, is attained through the achievement of art. By means of aesthetic permanence "infinite perfections fill the gap between the little given and the great

¹⁹ G.D. Josipovici, "*Lolita*: Parody and the Pursuit of Beauty", *Critical Quarterly*, VI (Spring, 1966), p. 44.

promised -- the great rose-gray never-to-be-had" (p. 241).
The illusion of art reconciles man's fancy with nature's
reality. The play world of the mind has a distinct
transforming power. It generates a realm of freedom, a
realm in which a typical adolescent becomes a character
in Eden; in which a pervert becomes a poet; in which a
culture of soda pop, potato chips, and roadside motels
becomes an American Eden; in which man's relation to
nature is reconciled through art; in which the machine
in the garden disappears.

CHAPTER FOUR

Metaphors in the Garden:

Ada and the Limits of Ludic Fiction

Ada represents a major reworking of the dominant Adamic theme in the Nabokov oeuvre, and carries on the tradition already established by *Lolita*. It is, like its predecessor, a novel of hope and despair, of a forbidden Eden thwarted by societal forces but achieved, ultimately if briefly, through the mind's sustaining power. Art triumphs over the failures of life and the real world of edict and denial. It challenges death and destruction. Van and Ada attain Edenic bliss ephemerally in two summers of childhood on the fantasy planet of Antiterra, Nabokov's name for his created Russian-American universe centred in Ardis, America. The book Van writes, which is the novel we read, captures the paradisaical essence of Ardis, and preserves it, in much the same way an entomologist pins a butterfly under glass for all to gaze on and admire. However, this is a paradise entombed and devitalized as much, at least, as it is enthroned, for the problems encountered in the fiction are major and rise to the foreground of any discussion of *Ada*. Thus before examining Nabokov's conceptualization of the Adamic myth, we shall look at some of the dilemmas of diction, language, and tone.

Centring Eden in an eighty-year mindspan deadens

the impact of an Adamic saga which buries itself in the trials of recollection. Since this recollection covers an enormous timespan in the long lives of a man and a woman, there are inherent temporal problems. On the one hand, the narrative is tediously sweeping and comprehensive; on the other, large gaps concerning the middle years of Van and Ada plague the narration. Most of this period is discussed and dismissed as a tangential reference, and treated without elaboration or insight.¹ One further danger is the lack of selectivity of detail. Another is the loss of immediacy and of reader involvement. The fiction loses a directness of impact after the childhood narrative ends and Van's adult quest to recapture it begins. The reader, moreover, cannot accept the plethora of contrivance which dominates even the earlier sections of the story. The banality and the predictability of the gamesmanship destroy much of the excitement of the children's bright and vibrant fantasy.

The second half of the fiction remains unable to capture any sense of energy and vitality. It becomes increasingly repetitious and tedious as Van recalls and repeats the youthful saga in enervating detail. The author gluts his creation and by so doing, negates its poignancy and effect. Whereas *Lolita* merges action with

¹ This point is discussed by Douglas Fowler in *Reading Nabokov* (London: Cornell University Press, 1974), p. 189.

image in a tense, exciting, and dynamic plot which demands a participatory response from the reader, *Ada* relegates this to a minimum for the primacy of Var's solipsism, and Nabokov's self-indulgence. There is little tension and no conflict in *Ada*, only a stultifying paean to a lost childhood. What passes as the central conflict between man and time is dispersed over such a long and rambling chronicle that it is unable to compel the reader's involvement, quite unlike the ordeal of Humbert, which is moving to the final word. And the inability of the reader fully to be absorbed into the Eden of Ardis spells the failure of the fiction to implement its aesthetic ethos.

The prime element in this artistic limitation is Nabokov's cloying insistence on contrivance and ludic self-absorption. Steiner notes that for negative commentators, "Nabokov's prose is a macaronic, precious, maddeningly opaque and self-conscious piece of candy floss At a first reading, *Ada* ... seems self-indulgent and, at many points, irredeemably overwritten. The Newspeak of *Ardor* is often on the same predictable level of ingenuity as double acrostics."² Steiner reserves judgement but it is unlikely most readers will be so kind.

Non-sequiturs are rife. *Ada* interjects into

² George Steiner, *Extraterritorial: Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1972), p. 19.

the tale, to make the sorts of comments one might expect from an involved proofreader. For example, when Van as narrator makes a pejorative comment about his book *Letters from Terra*, the author has Ada parenthetically remark, "I disagree, it's a nice. nice little book!" Similarly, Ada makes other editorial comments, such as "Hue or who? Awkward. Reword!,"³ which contribute an air of dilettantism, and add the dubious merit of the pastiche to the quality of the narration.

The narrator obtains a childish glee from looking back disjointedly on his story, and this story is the novel within the novel, which Nabokov projects as the novel we are reading. One feels the author is playing with mirrors and prisms to reflect images on his fiction at different angles, with little regard for the holistic pattern. Nabokov tries to create a whole through an exhausting series of superficial details and random images, with little cohesion beyond the element of play. The play element is central, yet within it, contrivance takes such a major role that one wonders about the essence; for the essence from many points of view rings strikingly hollow.

The author allows himself every indulgence in arranging and manipulating his story, in posing a set

³ Vladimir Nabokov, *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle* (New York: Fawcett World Library, 1969), pp. 258, 18. Further references are to this edition and will appear in parentheses.

piece. He gives unedited reign to his various biases, to his anti-Freudianism, to his dislike of T.S. Eliot, to his distaste for unrefined plebeians, to name a few; all of which make the novel seem more like an exercise in free association than a work of art. The author indulges himself through the central character, Van Veen, and his ludic predilection for games, puns, and puzzles, for walking on his hands and standing on his head, metaphorically as well as literally. Often the aesthetic achievement is comparable to that of a crossword puzzle or unscrambled anagram. The effect is of an artful yet contrived and silly composition.

Something is wrong with the way words and phrases flow. They are coyly studied; there is an aesthetically uncomfortable ring, as Nabokov hovers on the edge of self-parody. The affecting pathos of Humbert is exchanged for the bathetic ramblings of a satiated aesthete. Van Veen exists to tell us how much he knows, and what a brilliant man is his creator. The novel is consequently an immense catalogue of references to art, to writers, novels, and paintings, and especially to other works of Nabokov. Van is a self-conscious narrator and we feel we are observing a prolonged bout of navel-gazing. The effect is comparable to being shown a very personal family photograph album and being expected to exclaim in delight, without so much as recognizing a single figure or much caring who he is. In this fiction

contrivance destroys cogency, and authorial self-indulgence distances the reader out of the audience. Enchantment is lost in excess, and the importance of the tale for the reader dwindles to the minute as the story progresses. No negative capability helps Nabokov project *Ada* into the realm of the universal.

Unrefined and unedited bits and pieces of description and detail stare us in the face, and we are unable to discern why they are there. What, for instance, is the function of the band of poor townspeople intruding on Ardis as *Ada's* sixteenth birthday celebration gets underway? It is as if the story proper is stopped in mid-air, several unrelated paragraphs inserted, and then the story continued, unaffected by the tangential insert. The juxtaposition is odd; there are no elaborations or further references to the incident elsewhere in the book. The effect is somewhat cinematic; it is also disconcerting. One might, from it, anticipate a Tolstoy-like reference to the plight of the worker or the poverty of the peasant, or the vast indifference and imperturbability of the ruling class. Nabokov lays all these cards on the table, and then, with a wave of the hand, withdraws them. With tongue in cheek and a twinkling eye, he laments this "most melancholy and meaningful picture - but meaning what, what?" (p. 207).

The random character of this passage is notable; it is a felt incongruity characteristic of a Beckett

play or a Pynchon novel. For Nabokov this represents another jibe at the falsehood of verisimilitude and a reification of the novel as fantasy. Yet for the reader many confusions are created as he inevitably, and perhaps not so foolishly, looks for meaning and purpose. The vignette surely demonstrates the elitist imperturbability of the carefree Edenic world at Ardis, the bitchiness of Marina, the stuffiness of the whole family, the empty joys of a posh picnic. Yet if the reader dwelt on these issues, he would be mistaking a brushmark on a canvas for a studied, but enigmatic message. The confusion is a dead-end muddle.

Similarly, the episodic and vague aspect of much of the narrative is echoed again in the excursus in Part Two concerning the "Floramors," or exotic bordellos. It is a picaresque and nonsensical intrusion into the novel's plot. Presumably the main issue with which this chapter concerns itself is the folly of Van's sexual excesses, and his questing for Ada in unlikely places. The passage may also demonstrate the central "polymorphous perverse" sexual ethos of the entire novel. It may, further, comment on the relative immaturity of Van's Adamic dream and the exploitative nature of his sexuality. As evidence of Van's untiring satyriasis, the idleness of his life, the otiose qualities of his fantasies, and the irreplaceability of Ada, it makes itself felt. There is a correspondence between the nugatory experience of the

brothels, in microcosm, and Van's vitiated adult life, for surely no Eden exists out of Ardis but in the mind.

Even Van has the inchoate perspicacity of such a judgement. He knows that Floramors are a dream-like re-creation of his original paradise: "I had frequented bordels since my sixteenth year, but although some of the better ones, especially in France and Ireland, rated a triple red symbol in Nuġg's guidebook, nothing about them pre-announced the luxury and mollitude of my first Villa Venus. It was the difference between a den and an Eden." Moreover, "the ruinous villa no longer bore any resemblance to Eric's 'organized dream,' but the soft little creature in Van's desperate grasp was Ada" (pp. 269, 273). The chapter has many potential relevancies, yet there is an amorphous, discursive quality, the quality of an inserted rather than integrated element. No clear meaning exists to resolve this passage out of a thicket of incongruity and ambiguity.

Thus it is evident that *Ada* is plagued by a constant problem of tone. Indeed, this is a common dilemma of the contemporary novel, particularly ludic fiction, in which irony forms a fundamental tonal basis. Here we are not talking about a moral problem, though this issue may arise as well, but rather a central interpretational confusion.⁴ A destructive irony prevails

⁴ For a clarification of this issue see *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, by Wayne C. Booth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), Chapters Twelve and Thirteen.

in the experimental fiction of today. Interpretation stands ridiculed. Readers who bring modest formal expectations as they approach this fiction are meant to realize a terrible anachronistic fervour, a literary regression. Heckard calls Nabokov, Pynchon, Borges, and Barth authors of "metafiction," which represents "a renunciation of content, a tendency toward formalism, a lack of suppositions about human nature, and a preference of method to metaphysics." Heckard suggests "Metafiction's principal tool for the expanding of vistas is irony."⁵ Readers may expect unreliable narration, reversals of romantic and sentimental tradition, the parody of myth and popular culture. Where this leads, if anywhere, remains uncertain. The parody in *Ada* is wide-ranging and undisciplined. The ideal of Eden existing in Van's mind deploys a grotesque visage upon the nature of Nabokov's idealism; the framework confers distortion rather than empathy upon characters and author. There is no order or meaning beyond the reflections of the individual. Heckard points out that "It is because of this belief in something beyond the self that Gass criticizes Nabokov for writing novels which reflect only Nabokov."⁶

Lack of control and denial of a sense of the universal, of the external world, plague *Ada*. Throughout the third-

⁵ Margaret Heckard, "Robert Coover, Metafiction, and Freedom," in *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (May 1976), p. 211.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

person narration, the point of view is Van's; reality, memory, desire are perceived within the framework of his mind, sometimes under the guise of impersonal narration. The novel, after all, is a confessional chronicle told in a putatively impersonal fashion. What we are reading is the protagonist's self-conscious account of his own life, and his perception of these events is an unreliable gauge of emotional content.

The reader cannot but fail to have a dissimilar response to the world of *Ada* than that felt in the text by Van and Ada. The problem for the author is to bridge the gap between character and reader. The reader's immediate reactions are to be held in abeyance by the intricate use of irony. The dominant ironic control exerted in the novel is the paradox of a seemingly pristine and innocent child's world, a blithe and free Eden, infused with the central carnal knowledge of adult sin. This is not a moral confusion so much as a thematic difficulty, with an elaborate set of images and motifs contributing to an overwhelming but slightly inappropriate pictorial and metaphorical paradise. The paradise is inapposite because the created world of the novel fails to sustain it.

Further problems of tone are raised by the one-dimensional quality of the characterization. This problem is encountered in the works of Barth, Coover, and Pynchon, as well as Nabokov. One is unable to determine

whether the characters are sincerely depicted or affectedly delineated. As young as Van and Ada are in the opening sections of the novel, they never seem like children, or if they are children, they are the most singularly precocious children in the history of literature. Already they are acting the roles of *littérateur* and pedant. They are multilingual and communicate with each other easily in English, French and Russian. Their capacity for literary allusions and intellectual references is remarkable, though these transparently remind one of the author's own proclivity for literary gamesmanship, rather than the leisured pursuits of brilliant offspring. The highly stylized tone undercuts the possibilities of a realistic interpretation of the early part of the book, in favour of an exotic and esoteric fantasy. Yet the achievement of the novel is poised on the precarious tottering of Part One between sheer allegorical fantasy and psychological and chronological truth.

The trappings of setting, dress, and accent are clearly conceived and rooted in phantasmagoria; but the cogency of the tale depends on how well Nabokov can paint a convincing picture of two free children in the primal love relationship. To do this, the author must convince the reader that the characters are real within the terms of his work and their world. Taken within this context, there are many elements which ring false

and appear artificial, never transcending the appearance of authorial imposition. Van and Ada are depersonalized; often they are missing a life of their own by force of patently Nabokovian dialogue. Frequently they are wooden spokesmen for the authorial voice. At other times they are far too clever and cute. They are overly sophisticated despite the evidence of their precocity. They possess a peculiarly Proustian capacity for remembering and recording the past even while it is alive as the present. It is hard to conceive the following representative dialogue, for example, as casual conversation between a boy of fourteen and a girl of twelve; nor do prodigies speak as Nabokovian tomes read:

But as Van casually directed the searchlight of back-thought into that maze of the past where the mirror-lined narrow paths not only took different turns, but used different levels (as a muledrawn cart passes under the arch of a viaduct along which a motor skims by), he found himself tackling, in still vague and idle fashion, the science that was to obsess his mature years - problems of space and time, space versus time, time-twisted space, space as time, time as space - and space breaking away from time, in the final tragic triumph of human cogitation: I am because I die.

"But *this*," exclaimed Ada, "is certain, this is reality, this is pure fact - this forest, this moss, your hand, the ladybird on my leg, this cannot be taken away, can it? (it will, it was). *This* has all come together *here*, no matter how the paths twisted, and fooled each other, and got fouled up: they inevitably met here!"

"We must now find our bicycles," said Van, "we are lost 'in another part of the forest.'"

"Oh, let's not return yet," she cried,
"oh, wait."

"But I want to make sure of our whereabouts
and whenabouts," said Van. "It is a philosophical
need."

... Having worked out that metaphor, Van
and Ada decided it was really time to go
home (pp. 122-3).

In his depiction of these children, Nabokov attempts to be metaphorically amusing and contextually convincing. Unfortunately, he cannot be both. Although the reader will realize that the older Van is reflecting back on the unformed and incipient inklings of a child, nevertheless, there is a dissonance between character and expression; the reader cannot accept the plausibility of such dialogue. The audience is amused, yet the tale is reduced in the process. Parody and titillation, poignancy and authorial self-indulgence, may be exclusive of one another. In *Ada*, the American Adam degenerates into an abyss of narcissism.⁷

Clearly, the reader never knows for certain how to take things in *Ada*. Nabokov's use of irony is not altogether successful, and both setting and language conspire from the beginning to confuse and to distort. Through the fantasy of Ardis, Nabokov tries to fuse many diverse and contradictory elements. Before us in this novel we have the antipodal worlds of czarist Russia,

⁷ For a discussion of this problem, see Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in An Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Norton, 1979, Chapter I).

contemporary America, the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, the traditional novel and the contemporary one, clothes of a previous era, machines of the present day. The novel is a bizarre panorama of two centuries and different worlds. There is no purposive direction for the parody of realism, and this lack of direction is one of the primary defects of ludic fiction. The dominant problem is that of cogent presentation which is able to eschew confusion while maintaining a sense of merriment and amusement. Chronologically, the novel begins in 1884 and ends about 1967, but often there is amorphous distinction between past, present, and future. Past and present continually intrude on one another. The play of time is one of the preoccupations of the work, and confusion may arise as varied phases of time slide over each other like a series of coloured mirrors filtering pigment over a landscape. The effect is dazzling, daunting, sometimes hard to follow.

A final consideration of the problems generated by the fiction must be given to the difficulty and complexity of its language and allusions. Nabokov has coined many neologisms and they are disorienting. It takes the reader a while to discover where the action is taking place and the chronology of events. The "Antiterra" setting is a peculiarly Russian one; indeed, one is reminded of the great wooded estates of elite Russia during Nabokov's

childhood. Yet the venue is American. As much as it is a work of literature, the novel is also an elaborate and engaging puzzle. Pure fantasy merges with concrete reality. "Estoty," "Canady," "New Cheshire," California, and Manhattan are all part of the United States and "enjoy a halcyon climate under the Stars and Stripes" (p. 13). Fantasy is as real as reality; the reader's part of the game is not to filter fantasy from reality but rather to move past such considerations altogether.

The innumerable foreign terms and sentences, which enrich the reading if one is multilingual, add complexity and dissonance. This factor is crucial, for to a distanced and unsympathetic reader, the chronicle of *Ada* appears extrinsically without meaning. And unlike Joyce, who manages to achieve holistic cogency through the complexity of his language, Nabokov in *Ada* lets complex, disparate elements fall into incongruity and diffusion. Nabokov's style has always involved fairly demanding participation from the reader. *Lolita* contains many of these esoteric elements. Yet a fundamental difference between *Lolita* and *Ada* is the degree to which the enigmatic games of the author with his language dominate the narrative, or the extent to which the dynamism of character and theme transcends the ritual of language. The beautiful language and fine tropes which characterize Nabokov's style seem less free, less spontaneous, in *Ada* than in *Lolita*. Literary

references are complex and ubiquitous. This is good for the industry of scholarship if little else. Proffer has researched "a page by page explanation of Russian words, phrases, puns, anagrams, parodies, and allusions in *Ada*." He avers "*Ada* cannot be read intelligently if the ... allusions ... remain beyond the consciousness of the reader."⁸

Despite the problems outlined above, *Ada* remains a partially successful work of art. It presents a powerful exploration of the Adamic myth in contemporary literature and an interesting reworking of the dominant Nabokovian images and themes. In *Ada*, Nabokov creates a primal world of Edenic bliss, locating this world in the playground of Ardis, in America, and later centring Eden in the mind and words of Van and the novel he produces, the chronicle that is *Ada*. Nabokov postulates a verbal Eden eternalized in aesthetics, as the protagonists carry on a love affair not only with each other but with the fabric of language as well. Steiner argues, "It would be by no means eccentric to read the major part of Nabokov's opus as a meditation ... on the nature of human language. *The Gift*, *Lolita*, and *Ada* are tales of the erotic relations between speaker and speech ..."⁹ For Van Veen and for Nabokov, the aesthetic world preserves human experience and gives the permanence physical nature

8 Carl R. Proffer, "Ada as Wonderland: A Glossary of Allusions to Russian Literature," in *A Book of Things About Vladimir Nabokov*, ed. Carl R. Proffer (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ardis, 1974), p. 250.

9 Steiner, *Extraterritorial*, p. 18.

lacks. Art renders man the ability to create and re-create himself which is the service of the gods and the freedom of paradise.

Through the brilliant use of images and motifs, Nabokov presents a fictional world that recalls a lost Eden.¹⁰ There are the primal characters, Van and Ada, and the lush natural setting, the garden of Ardis. The world we view is, like Eden, entirely self-contained and independent. First this is seen in the child's freedom of play and later, as the mental creation of the protagonist, who by reliving, in his mind, the childhood Eden, is able in later life to transcend the temporal limits of the postlapsarian world through the solace of art. Only by creation of the verbal Eden can Van come to terms with the *angst* and loneliness of his adult life. The converse of the aesthetic Eden is, of course, the poverty of the real world and man's powerlessness to confront the inevitability of his own destruction.¹¹ If Van's life as a child was full and vibrant, his adult life remained relentlessly empty and without meaning. Only by the recollection of the past can the torments of present and future be assuaged. Thus Nabokov views the artful Edenic imagination, the aesthetic ethos, as the

¹⁰ For a tendentiously moralistic view of this topic, consult Bobbie Ann Mason, *Nabokov's Garden: A Guide to ADA* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ardis, 1974).

¹¹ This point is made by Page Stegner, *Escape into Aesthetics: The Art of Vladimir Nabokov* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1967).

sustaining force in Van's life and, by extension, in the generic life of man. To know Eden is to live, and to lose a sense of Eden means a spiritual and metaphorical demise, a desiccation of freedom and vitality.

After a sort of Biblical genealogy and a brief discussion of Van and Ada's forebears, the author introduces his protagonists to the reader in appropriately Edenic imagery: "The Veeñ-Durmanov wedding took place on St. Adelaida's Day, 1871. Twelve years and some eight months later, two naked children, one dark-haired and tanned, the other dark-haired and milk-white, bending in a shaft of hot sunlight that slanted through the dormer window under which the dusty cartons stood, happened to collate that date (December 17, 1871) with another (August 16, same year) ..." (p. 15). Certain key images appear in this passage and are echoed throughout the fiction. "Two naked children," the first description we have of Van and Ada, sets up the basic Edenic reference of Part One, generating the unspoiled picture of two children undisturbed by anything outside their own world. Although it is not until the next paragraph that the reader learns that one child is male and the other female, it is clear from the first that a primal relationship is involved.

The "sunlight" motif articulates words particularly associated with the Edenic world, and brings forward two of the dominant images of the fiction. Both "sun" and

"Light" are powerful images found in numerous places throughout *Ada*, by which the author calls into play an entire primordial galaxy and brings to mind an inviolable natural world. The natural world is further adumbrated by the names of the children's mother, Marina, and Van's ostensible mother, Aqua, with the sea imagery they evoke. Another important descriptive detail comes in the prolific use of flower, garden, tree, and other verdant imagery, for the idea of Eden is predicated on the lushness of a harmonious natural paradise, and the creation of a unique world through children's play.¹²

Images of fauna and flora play a preponderant role in evoking the elemental world of Ardis, its prelapsarian content, and also the sin and evil of fallen man. It is rare that Arcadian bliss is not tainted or blighted in some way, and Ardis is no exception. For example, "the two kids' best find ... came from another carton in a lower layer of the past. This was a small green album with neatly glued flowers ... The first twenty pages were adorned with a number of little plants collected at random, in August, 1869, in the grassy slopes above the chalet or in the park of the Hotel Florey, or in the garden of the sanitorium near it ..." (p. 16). In this case, the plants and flowers represent a "strange and sickening treasure" (p. 17). As a key

¹² A fine consideration of this issue may be found in David L. Miller, *Gods and Games: Toward a Theology of Play* (New York: World Publishing, 1969).

to the past they attain significance, revealing the sin of Van's conception, and infusing the children's Eden with the knowledge of their parents' symbolic original sin: "'I deduce,' said the boy, 'three main facts: that not yet married Marina and her married sister hibernated in my *lieu de naissance*: that Marina had her own Dr. Krolik, *pour ainsi dire*; and that the orchids came from Demon who preferred to stay by the sea, his dark-blue great-grandmother'" (p. 17). It is with this knowledge of their parents' sin that Van and Ada must come to terms with the ineluctable loss of Eden, as the incestuous basis of their love creates an Eden it will grow to destroy. When this happens the fugacious physical Eden becomes a mental entity.

Van's first sight of Ada reinforces the Adamic purpose of his quest with the Eve-like purity and beauty of Ada as a young girl. The flower leitmotif is heard once again as Ada presents herself to Van: "A victoria had stopped at the porch. A lady, who resembled Van's mother, and a dark-haired girl of eleven or twelve, preceded by a fluid dackel, were getting out. Ada carried an untidy bunch of wild flowers. She wore a white frock with a black jacket and there was a white bow in her long hair" (p. 38). The association of Ada with flowers continues on the next page as "Ada's black jacket and a pink-yellow-blue nosegay she had composed of anemones, celandines and columbines lay on a stool

of oak" (p. 39). Van's first bodily contact with Ada comes when she sits on his lap, with "her ample pine-smelling skirt" enveloping him, as "hot goutts of sun moved fast across her zebra stripes and the backs of her bare arms and seemed to continue their journey through the tunnel of his own frame" (p. 74). Here, "pine-smelling" suggests a natural appeal, and the use of "sun" reiterates the light motif associated with the warmth of Ada's character. Ada's inherent sexuality comes across as well. Nabokov skilfully employs many images in groupings which are able to evoke particular essences as well as total entities.

Since Nabokov paints a vivid pictorial reference for Ada from her introduction onwards, particularly in terms of flowers and light, the images he articulates are never far removed from the reader's conception of Ada. Thus attributes of the house and garden at Ardis come to us metaphorically as personal qualities of the heroine. When Ada takes Van on a tour of the great library, aspects of that room suggest Ada herself in parallel fashion. This symbolic interplay is reminiscent of the technique used by Virginia Woolf in *Between the Acts*, for example, to correlate character with object, though Nabokov is more explicit: "In a slant of scholarly sunlight a botanical atlas upon a reading desk lay open on a colored plate of orchids" (p. 41). Ada is the one member of the family who enjoys and uses the library,

and it is she who takes a special joy in the wonders of the family estate. Therefore it is appropriate that images which describe the family library are later specifically articulated in a poetic, Edenic, and lyrical description of Ada:

On those relentlessly hot July afternoons, Ada liked to sit on a cool piano stool of ivoried wood at a white-oilcloth'd table in the sunny music room, her favorite botanical atlas open before her, and copy out in color on creamy paper some singular flower. She might choose, for instance, an insect-mimicking orchid which she would proceed to enlarge with remarkable skill. Or else she combined one species with another (unrecorded but possible), introducing odd little changes and twists that seemed almost morbid in so young a girl so nakedly dressed. The long beam slanting in from the french window glowed in the faceted tumbler, in the tinted water, and on the tin of the paintbox - and while she delicately painted an eyespot or the lobes of a lip, rapturous concentration caused the tip of her tongue to curl at the corner of her mouth, and as the sun looked on, the fantastic, black-blue-brown-haired child seemed in her turn to mimic the mirror-of-Venus blossom ... Van would return to the purity of the sun-suffused room where a little girl, now glistening with sweat, was still painting her flower: the marvelous flower that simulated a bright moth that in turn simulated a scarab (pp. 82-3).

Apart from her intellect, perhaps the most distinctive feature of Ada is the whiteness of her skin. Despite the hot summer sun, Ada's complexion retains its milky softness; she never has a suntan. Clearly, her purity of skin has a symbolic value as the Arcadian innocence of Eve. Ada, like her mother, bears an uncanny resemblance to "'Eve on the Clepsydrophone' in Parmigianino's famous picture" (p. 21). This is a small art work which Demon

collected while courting Marina. "It showed a naked girl with a peach-like apple cupped in her half-raised hand sitting sideways on a convolvulus-garlanded support" (p. 20). The leitmotif of Ada as representative of "that Edenic girl" (p. 21) flows throughout Part One as a deeply suggestive image, and it is reinforced in almost every descriptive passage about the young Ada. The whole of Chapter Nine, Part One, is given over to a long lyrical discussion of the heroine's physicality, in which her pallor and blackness of hair stand out as dominant traits. Van, the perceiver, is overwhelmed by the purity and lustrousness of Ada's appearance. If white-skinned Ada is his country goddess, the Diana of Ardis, she is his Eve as well, as desire stirs within him:

His sentimental education now went on fast. Next morning, he happened to catch sight of her washing her face and arms over an old-fashioned basin on a rococo stand, her hair knotted on the top of her head, her nightgown twisted around her waist like a clumsy corolla out of which issued her slim back, rib-shaded on the near side. A fat snake of porcelain curled around the basin, and as both the reptile and he stopped to watch Eve and the soft woggle of her bud-breasts in profile, a big mulberry-colored cake of soap slithered out of her hand, and her black-socked foot hooked the door shut with a bang which was more the echo of the soap's crashing against the marble board than a sign of pudic displeasure (p. 55).

With the prominence given to Ada as a symbolic Eve, it is apposite that Nabokov should concentrate narrative detail on the garden motif. Van's initial

exposure to Ardis comes by way of the surrounding park and forest, "through pinewoods and over rocky ravines, with birds and other animals singing in the flowering undergrowth" (p. 36). Great trees line the lane to the manor as Van approaches, and the first thing he does after depositing his suitcase is "to make a *tour du jardin*" (p. 38). The sombre splendour of the imposing mansion is counterposed against "the green reality of the garden" (p. 47), where the children are at their freest. Ada's name suggests her close association with the garden and with nature, as Van realizes early in the novel: "He was beginning to like very much arbors and ardors and Adas. They rhymed" (p. 50).

It is in the arbor that Van and Ada's sexual contact begins. They are climbing an apple tree "at the bottom of the garden." Ada, "not wearing pantalets," is climbing above Van, who is holding onto her ankle. She slips, they lose balance, grabbing for each other, "and the next moment, as they regained a semblance of balance, his expressionless face and cropped head were between her legs and a last fruit fell with a thud - the dropped dot of an inverted exclamation point." Van then kisses Ada between the legs. This is transparently, parodically, Edenic; the scene could be labelled "temptation in the garden." To hammer this point (humorously) home, Van, in a later version of the incident given on the same page, authorially interposes

a concluding comment by Ada about their tree of delights -- "It is really the Tree of Knowledge - this specimen was imported last summer ... from the Eden National Park ..." (pp. 78-79).

Hence it may be seen that the garden metaphor is a key introduction to the extensive sexual imagery and erotic significance of *Ada*. Van and Ada often make love or have sexual interludes in the garden, as when, before the grand picnic on Ada's sixteenth birthday, "the wild girl and her lover slipped away for a few moments of ravenous ardor in a ferny ravine where a rill dipped from ledge to ledge between tall burnberry bushes" (p. 204-5). If freedom is basic to Eden, and clearly the author thinks it is, then sexual freedom is a fundamental assumption. The lovers' relationship is founded on the free expression of their ardour, and it is when society, through the agent of Demon Veen, puts a stop to this sexual freedom that their love is destroyed. It is further demonstrated that the abuse of another, in this case Lucette, curtails the movement toward freedom. It represents another snake in the garden driving the lovers apart.

The children discover the nature of their blood relation by way of the dried garden collection of Marina, as they are romping, freely and nakedly, in the attic. However, despite the parental precedent of sexual indulgence, Ada and Van's erotic freedom is

founded on a different code. This may be expressed as the primacy, if not the exclusivity, the sustaining power, the eternalness of their love and devotion. There are allusions to lesbianism, homosexuality, promiscuity, to the glories of the "polymorphous perverse." Van's sexual gymnastics are emphasized. None of these activities impinges on the lovers' bond. Within their private world, there are few taboos, certainly not the traditional or expected ones. The total freedom of play in Eden merges with the unlimited ardour and constancy of Van and Ada's sexual love.

The debauched atmosphere is articulated by the particular use of phallic images which function as a snake in the garden. A description of the dinner festivities on one occasion includes the memorable picture of Marina and Demon distorting "their shiny-lipped mouths in exactly the same way to introduce orally from some heavenly height the voluptuous ally of the prim lily of the valley, holding the shaft with an identical bunching of the fingers ..." (p. 199). Van masturbates well into middle age, and many sentences detail this activity. Sexuality becomes for the characters a relentless pursuit, a compulsive drive. Inside the Eden of Ardis this compulsive passion remains passionate and is elevated to the level of art, but out of the adolescent Arcadia it is primarily destructive and degenerative.

Inside Ardis, Van feels an aesthetic satisfaction with his sexual activity. He imagines himself a figure in a Renaissance masterpiece, "an oil on unframed canvas depicting two misbehaving nudes, boy and girl, in an ivied or vined grotto or near a small waterfall overhung with bronze-tinted and dark emerald leaves, and great bunches of translucent grapes, the shadows and limpid reflections of fruit and foliage blending magically with veined flesh" (pp. 112-13). Life merges with art in the Edenic conception. Sexuality itself is elevated to the level of an artistic if short-lived triumph, and this is made clear by the juxtaposition of this passage with the paragraph preceding it, connecting the erotic quest and the idea of freedom in the natural world with a pure state of aesthetic happiness:

They made love - mostly in glens and gullies.

To the average physiologist, the energy of those two youngsters might have seemed abnormal. Their craving for each other grew unbearable if within a few hours it was not satisfied several times, in sun or shade, on roof or in cellar, anywhere. Despite uncommon resources of ardor, young Van could hardly keep pace with his pale little *amorette* (local French slang). Their immoderate exploitation of physical joy amounted to madness and would have curtailed their young lives had not summer, which had appeared in prospect as a boundless flow of green glory and freedom, begun to hint hazily at possible failings and fadings, at the fatigue of its fugue - the last resort of nature, felicitous alliterations (when flowers and flies mime one another), the coming of a first pause in late August, a first silence in early September. The orchards and vineyards were particularly picturesque that year (p. 112).

The fiction we are reading is, of course, the aesthetic translation of ardour into art. Hence eros is eternalized in the mind by means of the artistic imagination. For us, as for Van and Ada, the verbal creation is a renewal of the freedom and sensuality of a golden age. The mystery and myth of the Adamic world are re-enacted, through the function of memory, as the product of artistic recollection. In the same way that the tradition of courtly love preserved for medieval man and woman the illusion of a perfect world where love and passion flowered, so also does this modern version of the Edenic myth seek to recapture, metaphorically, the primordial state of freedom and play. Yet for Nabokov the delight of words and images and the preeminence of play remain the essence of the myth. The myth, through art, survives the erosion of time and the limitations of an imperfect world:

... But speaking of love and its myths, do you realize - because I never did before talking to her a couple of years ago - that the people around our affair had very good eyes indeed? Forget Kim, he's only the necessary clown - but do you realize a veritable legend was growing around you and me while we played and made love?

She had never realized, she said again and again (as if intent to reclaim the past from the matter-of-fact triviality of the album), that their first summer in the orchards and orchidariums of Ardis had become a sacred secret and creed, throughout the countryside. Romantically inclined handmaids, whose reading consisted of *Gwen de Vere* and *Klara Mertvago*, adored Van, adored Ada, adored Ardis's ardors in arbors. Their swains,

plucking ballads on their seven-stringed Russian lyres under the racemosa in bloom or in old rose gardens (while the windows went out one by one in the castle), added freshly composed lines - naïve, lackey-daisical, but heartfelt - to cyclic folk songs. Eccentric police officers grew enamored with the glamour of incest. Gardeners paraphrased iridescent Persian poems about irrigation and the Four Arrows of Love. Nightwatchmen fought insomnia and the fire of the clap with the weapons of *Vaniada's Adventures*. Herdsmen, spared by thunderbolts on remote hillsides, used their huge "moaning horns" as ear trumpets to catch the lilt of Ladore. Virgin châtelaines in marble-floored manors fondled their lone flames fanned by Van's romance. And another century would pass, and the painted word would be retouched by the still richer brush of time (pp. 311-12).

In this passage the sexual activity of Van and Ada is transformed, albeit with heavy ironic overtones, into an idyll of courtly love. There is an obvious sense of literary fun-making, as there is in the excerpt from page 112. Nabokov here plays with another literary tradition, laughing at the notion of ideal romantic love, while at the same time retaining a core of Adamic seriousness. The love of Van and Ada is a mentally powerful experience even for those who observe it. Art remains the key to man's hopes and memories of paradise. Just as the courtly ideal was preserved in the chronicles, songs, and poetry of medieval and Renaissance man, so also is this example of the Adamic myth safeguarded for modern man by the fictions of the contemporary novel.

The play element in *Ada* forms the work's central

contribution toward Nabokov's aesthetic goal. The writer maintains a constant dialogue with the reader by means of extended literary games, by playing with his audience as with an opponent in a chess match. The reader is teased and cajoled by the author, and an underlying sense of irony assures that the perceptive reader will be aware that he is involved in an elaborate literary puzzle. What Nabokov, Barth, Borges, and other contemporary writers are doing is to posit a new relationship between novelist and reader, one which is not didactic but rather diverting and playful. Yet a central seriousness pervades the comedy, for games and play describe a major aspect of the created Eden. Man had the freedom to play in paradise, and this kind of fiction attempts to recall and to re-create the play element in culture. The Edenic novel thus articulates a basic and important source of man's freedom, a freedom of expression, conceptualization, and imagination.

The province of the mind becomes a sophisticated playground. Art's reason for being is defined by the culture of play, the fact that the spirit of man cannot survive for long without the freedom created by aesthetic expression, diversion, and release. In this context, then, it is not surprising that many contemporary novelists see fiction as a projection of the rich world of play. Certainly Nabokov rejects, vehemently, any tendentious imposition on the literary creation. Art

for him is not an extension of the real world; it is a separate world altogether. Fiction serves as its own reward, rests on its particular merits, determines its own universe, and centres everything on the coruscant ornaments of language and play, the ephemeral glistening landscape of Eden.

Nabokov's contempt for a functional and didactic interpretation of his fiction is demonstrated by his many comments on the subject, in introductions to his novels, within the texts, and in personal interviews. However, one brief passage from *Bend Sinister* illustrates the essence of the Nabokovian preoccupation with "the caviar of moonshine and poetry." In this novel the repressive state wishes to alter art for its own ends. The key to the destruction of art is the revision of *Hamlet* for the state's needs: "'As with all decadent democracies, everybody in the Denmark of the play suffers from a plethora of words. If the state is to be saved, if the nation desires to be worthy of a new robust government, then everything must be changed; popular common sense must spit out the caviar of moonshine and poetry, and the simple word, *verbum sine ornatu*, intelligible to man and beast alike, and accompanied by fit action, must be restored to power ...'"¹³

13 Vladimir Nabokov, *Bend Sinister* (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1974), pp. 97-98.

Yet the poetic word alone cannot fulfill the demands of fiction. Moreover, Nabokov gives us a highly ornamented version of the verbal edifice. Simplicity and understated power are the last qualities we would anticipate finding. What is more serious and damaging, however, is Nabokov's adamant refusal to relate anything to the outside world. The hermetic limitations of *Ada* and of much ludic fiction confront the reader with nothing but words and the words become oppressive in their own right. The novelists are telling us that words *qua* words are equally acceptable. They do not attempt to evaluate the totalitarian vision versus the freely chosen one or the cruel, selfish person over the kind, giving individual. The essence of humanity is missing from the game. Greenman argues that "the new fiction writers ... represent the first literary movement towards a total refusal to define reality."¹⁴ About the ostensible abandonment of mimesis, Greenman notes, "The plain fact remains, though it seems to be seldom acknowledged, that it is still the concrete detail in new fiction that makes it readable, however devalued, incongruous, or apparently -- though only apparently -- abandoned."¹⁵ In short, the visible world cannot be dismissed; our vision of it can simply be distorted, vitiated.

¹⁴ Myron Greenman, "Understanding New Fiction," in *Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 20, Number 3 (Autumn 1974), p. 313.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

Nabokov has unfortunately attracted a number of adulatory interpreters, and such admirers have done very little critically to evaluate his work. Rather, they give us guides and legends by which to follow the confusions and contrivances of the novels. Although Appel offers only his characteristic ecstasy about *Ada*, that it is "a supremely original work of the imagination," "an erotic masterpiece,"¹⁶ the critic Lee acknowledges that *Ada* "fails as does the later *Look at the Harlequins!*; for the two novels tend to be more about Nabokov's theme of the artist than realized works of art in themselves."¹⁷ Stuart posits that "It is possible to consider all of Nabokov's novels, as, to some degree, revealing the fiction of biography, and at least one of them, *Ada*, as a biography of fiction."¹⁸ Such comments indicate the pervasive solipsism of the artist who writes ceaselessly about the process of writing and the ratiocinations of the artist. The spirit and animation of the novel extend as lesser matters than the author's wholesale control over the literary game. William Gass has

16 Alfred Appel, Jr., "Ada described," in *Nabokov: Criticism, reminiscences, translations and tributes*, ed. Alfred Appel, Jr. and Charles Newman (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), p. 160.

17 L.L. Lee, *Vladimir Nabokov* (Boston: Twayne, 1976), p. 145.

18 Dabney Stuart, *Nabokov: The Dimensions of Parody* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), p. 133.

offered perhaps the most penetrating analysis to date:

The funny, the comical, side-splitting Nabokovian thing is that Nabokov's novels are frequently formless, or when form presides it's mechanical, lacking instinct, desire, feeling, life (nostalgia is the honest bloodstream of his books, their skin his witty and wonderful eye); and when the form is so ruthlessly imposed from the outside, seldom allowed to grow from within, rather bearing its bones and its hide as some insects do, then not only the end, but beginning and middle as well, are directed *deus ex machina*. We perceive this at once when the critics, clothed in butcher's aprons, carving come, for they clearly regard their discussions of construction as interpretations, and as they go about their operations, we hear not a squeak from the beast. What our author possesses in plenty is technique. *Pale Fire*, *Lolita*, and *Sebastian Knight* are built of devices: these bones make the meat.¹⁹

Nabokov risks much in *Ada* through his propensity for contrivance and in his mania to include the vastness of arcane trivia. Nowhere does he address the larger issues of the human condition nor does he explore the meaning of personal relations beyond the closed dyad of the relatively insufferable central characters. Gass notes that "Not only do the novels seem cold ..., there is a striking contrast between their rich contrivance and the thin interest they have for the entirely engaged mind."²⁰ Since Nabokov's games have no purpose beyond fleeting play, we feel with Rother that "It is as though a complex

19 William H. Gass, *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (Boston: Nonpareil Books, 1971), pp. 117-18.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 118.

mechanism had been designed specifically to build another mechanism whose only purpose was to observe itself in the act of being a machine."²¹ The exigencies of man and society are forgotten. A sterility prevails.

If lexical playfields determine the landscape of *Ada*, then some deeper probing into the nature of play may be helpful. As mentioned in the previous chapter, an excellent discussion of the play element in culture is Huizinga's study, *Homo Ludens*.²² Although this work fails to join the idea of play with a theory of aesthetics, it powerfully elucidates the significance of play for the poetic imagination. Defining play as "an activity which proceeds within certain limits of time and space, in a visible order, according to rules freely accepted, and outside the sphere of necessity or material utility," Huizinga emphasizes the essential freedom of the play world and the mood of "rapture and enthusiasm" (p.132). He reminds us of Eden when he tells us of play, "Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life it brings a temporary, a limited perfection" (p. 10). By these criteria Huizinga postulates an idea of play that bears central importance

21 James Rother, "Parafiction: The Adjacent Universe of Barth, Barthelme, Pynchon, and Nabokov," *Boundary 2*, Volume V, Number 1 (Fall 1976), p. 31.

22 Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949). All references are to this edition and will appear in parentheses.

to the Adamic myth in the contemporary novel.

The poignancy of *Ada* and of *Lolita* depends on the fleeting nature of the fictional universe, the limits imposed by time and space and the torments of death and denial. The freely accepted rules of the novel are the traditional literary conventions and more significantly, the agreement between author and audience that such rules exist to be flouted, or if you will, the rule that the obvious rules may be disregarded. Yet a "visible order" is upheld by the intricacies of description and detail and through the singular power of words: "a latticed gallery; a painted ceiling; ... butterflies and butterfly orchids in the margin of the romance" (p. 445). The memory of the adolescent Arcadia evokes in both reader and author a sense of childlike joy and wonder, and the playful mood is nurtured by a self-contained Edenic world of lexical games and literary puzzles.

A eurhythmy suffuses *Ada*; Nabokov controls the play element by the rhythm of the language he employs. Thus it becomes clear that the novel of play depends on balance and proportion. Nabokov's lexical playfields are ordered by form. Huizinga articulates the importance of form and order for play in a discussion which has much interest for the student of the contemporary novel, with specific relevance to the works of Nabokov:

Inside the playground an absolute and peculiar order reigns. Here we come across another, very positive feature of play: it

creates order, *is* order. Into an imperfect world and into the confusion of life it brings a temporary, a limited perfection. Play demands order absolute and supreme. The least deviation from it "spoils the game", robs it of its character and makes it worthless. The profound affinity between play and order is perhaps the reason why play, as we noted in passing, seems to lie to such a large extent in the field of aesthetics. Play has a tendency to be beautiful. It may be that this aesthetic factor is identical with the impulse to create orderly form, which animates play in all its aspects. The words we use to denote the elements of play belong for the most part to aesthetics, terms with which we try to describe the effects of beauty: tension, poise, balance, contrast, variation, solution, resolution, etc. Play casts a spell over us; it is "enchanting", "captivating". It is invested with the noblest qualities we are capable of perceiving in things: rhythm and harmony (p. 10).

It shows the success of Nabokov's craft that he approaches so close to artistry by the use of a few beautifully articulated images which echo throughout his fiction. Rich ornaments decorate the best poetic language of *Ada*. As Huizinga points out, "What poetic language does with images is to play with them. It disposes them in style, it instils mystery into them so that every image contains the answer to an enigma" (p. 134). Thus a few core motifs can adumbrate an entire Edenic epistemology. The literary games, the art motifs, and the images of flowers and trees, gardens and arbours, lightness and colour, delineate throughout the novel the fine irretrievability of the Adamic experience, and the memory of it which the mind retains. The key is poetic consciousness, a verbal creation in the mind. This is

not a function of reality, or an extension of the everyday world. It is an imaginative entity complete, by itself, in the mind of the artist.²³ Nabokov has designed a universe through reverberative images which engender a playfield of the mind. The formal cohesion of *Ada* is its pattern of images. Here the ludic nature of man asserts itself, as Huizinga argues:

Poiesis, in fact, is a play-function. It proceeds within the play-ground of the mind, in a world of its own which the mind creates for it. There things have a different physiognomy from the one they wear in "ordinary life", and are bound by ties other than logic and causality. If a serious statement may be defined as one that may be made in terms of waking life, poetry will never rise to the level of seriousness. It lies beyond seriousness, on that more primitive and original level where the child, the animal, the savage and the seer belong, in the region of dream, enchantment, ecstasy, laughter. To understand poetry we must be capable of donning the child's soul like a magic cloak and of forsaking man's wisdom for the child's (p. 119).

The notion of literature as game is a pervasive one in *Ada* and merits close attention. The kaleidoscopic perspective taken by Van as narrator illustrates this. Often Van will describe an incident, such as the "shattal tree" adventure, in the active tense, presumably as it occurred. Then he will offer his revised recollection of the event which is, in turn, altered by Ada's negation of Van's version or her correction of it. This

²³ This issue is discussed by R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (1938; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 125-53.

is in microcosm somewhat like Fowles's dual endings of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. The reader is reminded that there are "only words to play with." Similarly, Ada will tell Van as he is writing the autobiography we are supposedly reading, that she never had an outfit like the one he claims he initially saw her in, producing an indelible image on his mind. Anyone who takes verisimilitude as an aesthetic tenet will be worried by the playfulness of these passages. Obviously the author feels that only temporary truths come in fictional glimmerings, that fiction is as true as any other fantasy.

Like the poetry of Wallace Stevens, the fiction of Nabokov offers a transient verbal Eden in which to live; this world is valid briefly until another fiction comes along and supplants it. Evidently, then, to assess fiction as a guide to or recommendation of life in the real world would be seriously to misread Nabokov's intent. The novel of play looks essentially into itself and its genre rather than beyond. A different or renewed consciousness is the reward of the novel, and its meaning. The other meanings are the richness of language and the fun of the game. The play of words becomes the communicated refuge of art and artists, the anodyne of Nabokov and his protagonists. Moreover, a consciousness produced by the Edenic imagination is not disposable. Pifer argues that the ludic games in *Ada* are balanced by a strong awareness of the moral and social limitations

of aesthetic bliss: "After rendering a world like Antiterra, whose characters are so devoted to the 'supreme' reality of art and ardor, Nabokov reverses all our expectations by illustrating just how devastating to human life such a world can be." She notes that the lust for art "has eaten through the barriers of restraint and moderation, destroying, as well, the consolations -- affection, loyalty, charity -- which make relations among human beings bearable on earth."²⁴

In many ways art itself is the subject of *Ada*, and the novel may be seen as a *Künstlerroman* about the development of Van into an artist. Yet unlike *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, for example, Van's struggle comes to us with a lightness and a frivolity foreign to the Joycean prototype. For Van and for Ada, art and the creation of fiction are basically other forms of diversion and play, a play which communicates and distills words and images into the fineness of language. The novel presents a category of comments about language, painting, literature, and the development of the novel. Nabokov plays upon the element of contrivance and depends upon the reader's familiarity with literature and painting to parody famous artists and eminent works; he takes art from the pantheon and brings it into the gameroom. The play of

²⁴ Ellen Pifer, "Dark Paradise: Shades of Heaven and Hell in *Ada*," *Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 25, Number 3 (Autumn 1979), pp. 493,494.

Eden continues in art, and renews the aesthetic perspective.

Humour is a crucial factor in the verbal pattern, and this novel is no less a homage to art because it is funny. Thus in one early passage we are told how "Jane Austen might have phrased it, for the sake of rapid narrative information" (p. 17); in another we learn that our introduction to Ardis is presented in the narrative style of the Victorian novel, as, "At the next turning, the romantic mansion appeared on the gentle eminence of old novels" (p. 37). Nabokov has a joke on Maupassant as the sensationally bad novella written by the French governess has striking parallels with Maupassant's own work. Nabokov has fun with his own previous novels as well, particularly with *Lolita*. We learn that on Ada's twelfth birthday she "was permitted to wear her lolita (thus dubbed after the little Andalusian gipsy of that name in Osberg's novel and pronounced, incidentally, with a Spanish 't,' not a thick English one), a rather long, but very airy and ample, black skirt, with red poppies or peonies, 'deficient in botanical reality,' as she grandly expressed it, not yet knowing that reality and natural science are synonymous in the terms of this, and only this, dream" (pp. 66-67).

"Nymphets" is a recurring word in *Ada*, and its connection with the obsession of Humbert is never far from the surface of the narrative. Lucette is identified

as a nymphet and she is destroyed by sexual obsession in the same way as Lolita, a victim of unintended cruelty. The allusion is carried further as Ada's role in *Don Juan's Last Fling* is that of the nymphet Dolores, "lifted from Osberg's [Borges's] novella" (p. 371). The author mentions John Shade, "a modern poet" (p. 411), who appears familiar to readers of *Pale Fire*. The effect of these allusions is akin to that of a gigantic crossword puzzle or the challenge of a chess match. The only cohesive meaning is that of the game.

As the *Künstlerroman* takes shape, we see Van as the artist and the artist as a player and gamesman. Van can stand on his head and walk on his hands; he is excellent at cards and "a first-rate chess player" (p. 172). He even enters the stage, briefly, as a sort of magus, a magician-cum-showman. The game motif is reiterated throughout the novel, and Chapter Thirty of Part One describes the exploits of the protagonist in the theatre as Mascodagama the illusionist. Mascodagama delights his audiences with the athletic tricks he can perform in the same way that Nabokov charms his readers with lexical puzzles to unravel. In later years we see Van, fat and alone, wondering "what really kept him alive on terrible Antiterra, with Terra a myth and all art a game" (p. 344). The metaphor of Antiterra is an elaborate game. Verbal play, games, and tricks are metaphors "in the rose garden of Ardis". To develop a game, to play with metaphors in

the garden, restore to man the Adamic consciousness. Van speaks in the authorial voice when he describes the importance of a playful talent and the talent of play:

The essence of the satisfaction belonged rather to the same order as the one he later derived from self-imposed, extravagantly difficult, seemingly absurd tasks when V.V. sought to express something, which *until* expressed had only a twilight being (or even none at all -- nothing but the illusion of the backward shadow of its imminent expression). It was Ada's castle of cards. It was the standing of a metaphor on its head not for the sake of the trick's difficulty, but in order to perceive an ascending waterfall or a sunrise in reverse: a triumph, in a sense, over the ardis of time. Thus the rapture young Mascodagama derived from overcoming gravity was akin to that of artistic revelation in the sense utterly and naturally unknown to the innocents of critical appraisal, the social-sense commentators, the moralists, the idea-mongers and so forth. Van on the stage was performing organically what his figures of speech were to perform later in life -- acrobatic wonders ... (pp. 144-45).

The Edenic world at Ardis is a realm of play. The novel discusses in detail actual and imaginary games conceived by the children. Ada introduces Van to her sun-and-shade games; he initiates her into erotic games. She also finds pleasure in word games and likes to make anagrams with her friend Grace: "insect, incest, nicest" (p. 205). To play their amorous games, Van and Ada must engage Lucette in numerous diversions; they play scrabble and hide-and-seek while scheming to keep Lucette out of their erotic preserves. Marina has her acting games. Kim the houseboy has his own invidious photographic games. And amorous play absorbs most of the Veen

household. The notion of playing in the garden is one of the novel's dominant leitmotifs; the words "game," "player," and "play" are displayed prominently.

The major game besides sex is played with words, and in a larger sense, the game of words is the content of the novel.²⁵ Hence we can understand the significance of the "verbal circuses" (p. 170) of the narrative if we discern them as intricate metaphors for the creation of the Adamic experience of fiction. This explains why Nabokov dedicates a relatively long chapter to a discussion of word games. Chapter Thirty-six is central to an understanding of the novel because it demonstrates the key to Eden through a verbal passage, a word-nurtured idyll. The pursuit of words for their intrinsic beauty and the consciousness they confer, this is the centre of Nabokov's aesthetic ethos.

The other word game that the children play is with literature itself, becoming not only a game but a communication as well. To obtain secrecy in their correspondence, they adopt an elaborate system of codes based on two literary works, Marvell's poem "The Garden" and Rimbaud's "Mémoire." Ada and Van, like the author, centre much on the enigmatic quest for the right word. Just as Marvell's Adam creates in his mind a transcendent

25 Julia Bader, in *Crystal Land: Artifice in Nabokov's English Novels* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1972), p. 126, makes this point.

world, similarly the literary Adam effects a transfer of consciousness through play. The verbal Eden of the mind is shown "Annihilating all that's made/To a green thought in a green shade."²⁶ The effect of the novel, stripped of its excesses, is precisely this. Van has the perspicacity to discern that the Edenic world and the real world will intersect only once, in the play of childhood. In old age Ada and Van hardly remind us of the primal couple; Van is fat and balding and Ada has varicose veins and dyed blonde hair. Their final reunion is anticlimactic. Yet as far as a recollection of the past through the writing of the novel can briefly deny the mundane oppressions of growing old and impotent, then the power of the mind and memory can retrieve the green garden of Adam. Memory is an important tool, but at the core there are only words and the games we can play with them. The expression of meaning preponderates insofar as words and images form a coherent unit and pattern a particular consciousness.

Concluding remarks must focus on the temporal element in *Ada*, and the relationship it has, if any, with the Edenic experience. Nabokov's application of the time theme depends, too, not on the solidity of language and metaphor, but on the disharmonious function

²⁶ Andrew Marvell, "The Garden," in *The Metaphysical Poets*, ed. Helen Gardner (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1974), pp. 255-58.

of biased, pedestrian opinions and hollow-sounding words. Part Four, where the time theme is expounded in great and unnecessary detail, suffers a dearth of elegant language, penetrating wit, and stylistic subtlety. It is long and tedious, and offers little else but a chance for Nabokov to cavil at his pet dislikes, such as Einstein's Theory of Relativity.²⁷

Under the guise of Van's philosophical work, *The Texture of Time*, the author delineates his notion of time as nonlinear and independent of spatial perceptions. He tells us that rhythm is basic to "perceptual Time," and declares time's prime immobility. The most significant point about time as far as this novel is concerned comes to us, however, in the consideration that "Time is but memory in the making" (p. 425). The treatise on time connects with the Edenic myth in its emphasis on the function of memory; both underscore the act of consciousness in creating its own world, and the innate mental capacity of men to recollect the past by the power of images and language: "The Past, then, is a constant accumulation of images. It can be easily contemplated and listened to, tested and tasted at random, so that it ceases to mean the orderly alternation of linked events that it does in the large theoretical sense. It is now a generous chaos out of which the genius of

27 Douglas Fowler, *Reading Nabokov*, p. 200.

total recall, summoned on this summer morning in 1922, can pick anything he pleases ..." (p. 413). The metaphors of the novel create Eden in the mind just as the images of the past re-create it. The author establishes "that Time is a fluid medium for the culture of metaphors" (p. 406). Clearly Nabokov's analogy between Van's later life and the art of the novel is well taken as the ability of words in fiction to defeat time. Verbal playfields render a new consciousness from fictional fantasy.²⁸ And Nabokov's fictional metaphors seem better able to express this notion than his philosophical ramblings. Art makes time cease and preserves a moment forever:

... about the rapture of her identity. The asses who might really think that in the starlight of eternity, *my*, Van Veen's, and *her*, Ada Veen's, conjunction, somewhere in North America, in the nineteenth century represented but one trillionth of a trillionth part of a pinpoint planet's significance can bray *ailleurs, ailleurs, ailleurs* (the English word would not supply the onomatopoeic element; old Veen is kind), because the rapture of her identity, placed under the microscope of reality (which is the only reality), shows a complex system of those subtle bridges which the senses traverse -- laughing, embraced, throwing flowers in the air -- between membrane and brain, and which always was and is a form of memory, even at the moment of its perception. I am weak. I write badly. I may die tonight. My magic carpet no longer skims over crown canopies and gaping nestlings, and her rarest orchids. (p. 170)

28 This point is made by Tony Tanner, *City of Words: A Study of American Fiction in the Mid-twentieth Century* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971), pp. 15-49.

The miseries of being old and near to death can be overcome, fleetingly, by the "very local palliative of articulate art,"²⁹ as Humbert declares in a moment of despair and recrimination. The rare Edenic moments of being transcend time while preserving it; they are verdant glistenings from the garden, an eternal green of renewal. Again, as in *Lolita*, we perceive the impossibility of a worldly Eden, the ineluctability of its defeat amid degeneration, corruption, and death. But in contrast to the moving portrayal of Lolita's destruction, Humbert's realization of his culpability, and his own approaching death, the language of *Ada* never attains the defamiliarization and universality of its predecessor. Eden lies buried in a lexical morass. If much is lost in *Ada*, not the least is the relevancy of time, the meaning of language, the immortality of words, and the sustaining embrace of humanity.

²⁹ Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (New York: Berkley, 1966), p. 258.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Eden of Words:

The Self-Generating Parody of John Barth

Play fiction presupposes an object of play, an object ever malleable and fluid, one which grows from itself and then stands outside and alone, a separate entity, ephemeral yet invincible. Such is the function of the word and the idea in contemporary fiction. To examine the works of John Barth is to illustrate both the seminal and the sterile aspects of the coeval literary endeavour. Barth assumes the presence of an American myth, he unites it with a function of verbal play, and then he explodes the whole structure into an abyss of clever blankness and artful absurdity. It is, for him, a tenebrous mist which covers the glitter of language and allusion. Fitzgerald's green light at the end of the bay becomes for Barth an Edenic illusion which focuses the role of fiction as affirmation of its potency and as the simultaneous denial of its reality. And for Barth, reality is the least important region with which the mind need bother.

To understand the critical framework in which "Lost in the Funhouse" and *The Sot-Weed Factor* will be viewed, it is necessary to discuss some of the analytic notions pervading the Edenic myth. Eden itself implies a fertile region of endless possibility, a natural freedom

in which man can create anything his mind can imagine. Eden means a garden where the word became flesh, where an idea attained fulfillment and man was free to formulate his universe. For the novel, this Edenic myth is translated into a verbal territory, so that man and his experience are reified, so that man himself becomes the creative agent of the word, and the word creates the world anew. Just as Adam pursued a pattern of play in paradise, so also does the novelist play in a special and essential manner in the fiction of today.

We are talking fundamentally about the potential for form to be imposed on a created fiction. The crucial difference between the form of the Edenic novel of play and that of the traditional novel is the dominant tone of ironic, arbitrary, and self-conscious imposition or artifice pervading contemporary fiction, the adoption of a gamesman-like attitude, and the conatus toward higher consciousness and freedom by means of the verbal pattern. The reader feels that the author is performing a rite of entertainment, that he is witnessing a magus erecting a structure of willful illusion, in the same way that Conchis in *The Magus* and Burlingame in *The Sot-Weed Factor* deliberately enact roles and stage events. The author, through his characters and sometimes directly in his own voice, demonstrates that reality is a fiction and that the

source of belief for man must centre on self-created words and ideas because there is no external sustaining structure. Yet the consolation of the mental landscape is great since in its fineness and endless possibility man can locate and fulfill his visions of paradise. He can create a verbal and ideational playground with the mythical beasts of Borges, the neologisms of Nabokov, or the simulated history of Barth. And to these he may add the fictions of his own.

If "in the beginning," as John Locke said, "all the World was America,"¹ this idea of America has now colonized the mind of man and structured the aesthetic groundwork of the contemporary fiction discussed in the present study. As Chapter Two delineates, for the European, as later for the American, the notion of a virgin wilderness, a potential garden of delights, has always been a potent and moving conception. Indeed, it is the synthesis of this concept with the aesthetic of play and freedom which generates the power of today's fiction. The verbal Eden is aligned with, yet transcends, the myth of an earthly paradise. This is a myth explored by Shakespeare in *The Tempest*,² and probed by the European artist for centuries. It has been shown to be an illusion, perhaps even a delusion,

1 Quoted by Peter N. Carroll and David W. Noble in *The Free and the Unfree: A New History of the United States* (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1977), p. 15.

2 Leo Marx, in *The Machine in the Garden* (New York: Oxford, 1964), Chapter II, makes this point in a cogent discussion.

yet the myth is imbued with an attraction so strong that it lingers still, palpably felt in fiction and in the national life of the American people.

Similarly, although clearly Barth wishes to deny the truth of the Edenic claim of the American continent on the European mind and on the native point of view, his ineluctable containment in it controls some eight hundred pages of narrative prose in *The Sot-Weed Factor*. The enormous network of the myth is fecund enough to spawn a fictional dialectic of Eden and play and to translate itself into the ironic novel in which author and protagonists exist as players who, magus-like, create themselves and a fiction in which to live. The audience play, too, and join the artist and his heroes in becoming the new Adams, through a wholly fictional vehicle posited to exist out of time and apart from history.

The translation from myth to fiction (which one can perceive as an interchange) is dependent upon the free play of consciousness, upon the mind of man creating its own idea of itself and determining other facts of life from this basic premise. More than any other single idea, such fiction is dominated by the author's internal drive to create himself, to let his consciousness play upon a story, rather than simply relating a story in the traditional fashion. It is a striving inward toward a verbal garden of freedom, in

which the self is defined through characters and plot, and the author refrains from dilating upon the world outside. The contemporary novelist in this study subscribes to the Hegelian precept wherein the mind patterns the world and consciousness creates freedom:

The absolute goal, or, if you like, the absolute impulse, of free mind ... is to make its freedom its object, i.e. to make freedom objective as much in the sense that freedom shall be the rational system of mind, as in the sense that this system shall be the world of immediate actuality ... In making freedom its object, mind's purpose is to be explicitly, as Idea, what the will is implicitly. The definition of the concept of the will in abstraction from the Idea of the will is 'the free will which wills the free will'.

The will's activity consists in annulling the contradiction between subjectivity and objectivity and giving its aim an objective instead of subjective character ...³

Hence the artist pursues his own Eden through the novel of artifice and play, the novel which is introduced as an act of self-conscious yet objective creation standing outside the world or beyond its confines. Nevertheless, the fiction owes much to the world outside it, for the source materials are those belonging to the "real" world and the author's experience in society. But it has been at a further stage filtered through the artistic consciousness and transformed by it. As Poirier has noted, "the creation of America out of a

³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952; reprint, 1978), pp. 32-3.

continental vastness is to some degree synonymous in the imagination with the creation of freedom, of an open space made free ... for some unexampled expansion of human consciousness."⁴ Just as Burlingame and Ebenezer create themselves in the course of *The Sot-Weed Factor*, so is this a metaphor for the function of art to determine, renew, and expand consciousness, to postulate and enlarge a mental region of infinite creative possibility and endless potential for freedom, a realm in which the subjective quest for freedom becomes universal.

Play is a corollary of the freedom of consciousness in the novel, and this is nowhere better demonstrated than in Barth's short story "Lost in the Funhouse". The story is valuable in itself and further serves as a heuristic device for pointing out some essential precepts of the contemporary fiction under discussion, which I have labelled "ludic fiction". The title theme is, in fact, indicative of the probing of its author for an artistic playground, for a verbal labyrinth leading ultimately to an Eden of the mind. Written in 1967, "Lost in the Funhouse" (hereafter abbreviated as "LF") articulates the central thrust of the fiction of Barth, Nabokov, Pynchon, Fowles, and Coover, and it illuminates a search which seeks the commitment of consciousness to

⁴ Richard Poirier, *A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature* (New York: Oxford, 1966), p. 4.

itself, independent of the demands of society and the external world. The fertile ground of the story is analogous to the contemporary aesthetic preoccupation of locating reality in words, in the signifier, as much, if not more so, as in what is signified. Words are the ideas which form the content of these fictions, and "LF", which may be taken as an engaging story of adolescence, may be seen as an equally competent and cogent view of the art of fiction, of the contemporary negation of verisimilitude, and of the role of the author as a magus in a funhouse of words.

As noted in the preceding chapters, the role of writer as magician juggling words means that the artist is necessarily a self-conscious artificer. Barth grapples with his task as a writer and ponders in his fiction the open-ended possibilities for consciousness to expand a world where all the signposts have been dismantled and the limits made void. He incorporates into "LF" a challenging perspective of critical analysis in much the same way that a magician might expose his bag of tricks, doing so as much for his own fun as for an eagerly curious audience.

The ludic metaphor is particularly fitting for this short story because the dominant motif is that of games and play in a funhouse at an amusement park on a day of national celebration and revelry. The setting itself has many Edenic echoes; the weather is hot and pleasant,

the sun is shining, and the sea presents an inviting vista. The funhouse itself may be taken as an effective symbol of the garden of play in industrial society, and on a further level, as a skilful metaphor for fiction *qua* fiction. And Ambrose, the protagonist, is as innocent and naïve as we may presume Adam to have been when his eyes beheld the first garden of pleasure. The other visible actor in the funhouse drama is, of course, the author, who takes on an Adamic role as well, as he creates his imagined world from the endless possibility awaiting his touch. The artist, like primordial man, is free to experience and create a unique universe.

It is through the consciousness of Ambrose, the young Adam, that the story reaches us. Ambrose, as we know from "Ambrose His Mark," one of the early stories collected with "LF", named himself in the bee-covered garden of his parents' home. That is, in the sense that his (bee-shaped) birth-mark created an identity for him, it may be said that his personality intrinsically contributed to his nominative conception. Hence Ambrose is innately gifted with a place in the world of artifice. He is reflective and clever and endowed with a special quality of being able to seek out experience and "reality" until he can uncover the bag of tricks which lies beneath the surface. For example, Ambrose gained an early initiation into "the shade-sun situation,"⁵

⁵ John Barth, "Lost in the Funhouse," in *Lost in the Funhouse* (New York: Bantam, 1969), p. 73. All future references are to this edition and will appear in parentheses.

the game of spotting the towers of a power station first. Ambrose knew the solution by the time he was four years old. This car game of recognition is significant as it introduces and enlarges the metaphor of games throughout "LF", as it reveals the overriding thematic import of Barth's fiction.

The play world of the tale, a natural and unobtrusive device presented in the context of a family on holiday, is yet taken further by Barth to encompass the stage of literary tricks and the mechanisms activating them. Ambrose, as an authorial representative, must know the game and participate in it, at least sometimes, although he understands the artifice involved, for without the game and the awareness it brings, the journey would indeed be tedious. If meaning is denied on one level, it yet is increased on another, for Ambrose, like Barth with language, is self-consciously cognizant of the props employed, and thus more highly conscious in general:

For as long as the boys could remember, "looking for the Towers" had been a feature of the first half of their excursions to Ocean City ... Though the game was childish, their mother preserved the tradition of rewarding the first to see the Towers with a candy-bar or a piece of fruit. She insisted now that Magda play the game: the prize, she said, was "something hard to get nowadays." Ambrose decided not to join in; he sat far back in his seat. Magda, like Peter, leaned forward ... The simple strategy for being first to espy the Towers, which Ambrose had understood by the age of four, was to sit on the right-hand side of the car. Whoever sat there, however, had also to put up with the worst of the sun, and so Ambrose, without

mentioning the matter, chose sometimes the one and sometimes the other. Not impossibly Peter had never caught on to the trick, or thought that his brother hadn't simply because Ambrose on occasion preferred shade to a Baby Ruth or tangerine.

The shade-sun situation didn't apply to the front seat, owing to the windshield: if anything the driver got more sun, since the person on the passenger side not only was shaded below by the door and the dashboard but might swing down his sunvisor all the way too (pp. 72-3).

Ambrose's knowledge of the tricks in the game on the way to the beach parallels Barth's self-consciousness about the tools of his craft. In the course of the story Barth compulsively opens the writer's bag of tricks and reveals not so much the beauty of his play with words as the possibilities for play itself. In this sense Barth's style is more similar to that of Nabokov in *Invitation of a Beheading*, where a dominant toying with language and with the audience prevails above all else, rather than the style of *Lolita*, where language is exalted for the rich patterns of the poetic landscape it evokes. In much the same way that Pynchon in *V.* makes a game with events and identities, so does Barth tease the reader as he plays with words, bantering us with our expectations for fiction. For this writer, the form of a conventional tale is a subject for raillery, since he sees it as an anachronism in the contemporary world. Barth implies, why should our fiction attempt to be true to "reality" when even the external world sometimes falls short of attaining that expectation?

What is beneath the surface of a story is not a model of reality waiting to expose itself, but rather an intricate network of verbal tricks and literary jokes, and it is these which "LF" points out. In doing so, it functions as a key foil to the assumptions of the conventional reader.

The studied emphasis on the fictive framework records a central concern for the role of the imagination, for the facility of consciousness to create its own freedom. In this sense, contemporary literature elevates and exalts the role of the reader and makes him an Adam of sorts, for ultimately it is he who grasps the fiction and makes it live in his mind. As we shall see in the next chapter, Barth shares this idea with Fowles, who in *The Magus* shows Nicholas representing the role of the reader as he re-creates the fictions of Conchis in his mind. Here the reader is an active participant, a new Adam along with the author, for the creative sensibility of the audience is a requisite if meaning can be ascribed. No longer does the writer arrange a set pattern of reality to which the reader brings little but the power of literacy. The reader must be active in order skilfully to perceive the irony in ludic fiction. The reader is also a player. He must make his moves on the chessboard of a story for the author to achieve the crucial communication and the *agon* of gamesmanship (in the classical Greek sense) for which he aims. The verification for the power of a story

is not the outside world; it is not some conjunction with "reality," but rather a merging with the imagined response in the reader's mind. The mind is the landscape on which the funhouse is built. It is consciousness which contains and asserts the resources of freedom and creativity for the verbal Eden.

The extreme and deliberate authorial self-consciousness apparent in "LF" is a pellucid veil for the mind's knowledge of itself, for the natural shorthand utilized by the artist in the creative act. Barth is revealing the nerve endings and the energy transmissions which produce ideas and initiate the story or the novel. It is as if he is slowing down the process of the literary autonomic nervous system and exposing all the neural connections which must be made before any clear notion of plot, character, or ideas can be conveyed. Yet the point to which he returns again and again is the pivotal function of words. What literature amounts to is words. This is no meagre assumption, for what words amount to are signifiers for the whole world.

The narrative begins in dramatic fashion. The idea of the funhouse is introduced immediately and is immediately challenged. Taking the funhouse to be a concrete amusement at Ocean City, the reader finds himself drawn into Barth's opening query with a spontaneous rush. He also discovers a quick sympathy for the protagonist Ambrose, although he does not know why Ambrose feels

"fear and confusion" (p. 69). In the third sentence, Barth articulates the basic plot of the story. Ambrose, he relates, "has come to the seashore with his family for the holiday, *the occasion of their visit is Independence Day, the most important secular holiday of the United States of America*" (p. 69). The major portion of the paragraph is, however, given over to a detailed analysis of italics: "A single straight underline is the manuscript mark for italic type, *which in turn is the printed equivalent to oral emphasis of words and phrases ...*" (p. 69). The digression takes over the story, and as illustrated in the foregoing paragraphs, the digression may be seen as a constitutive element, as much as the fears and confusions of thirteen-year-old Ambrose. We are reminded of the plaintive words of Todd Andrews, anti-hero of *The Floating Opera*, that one can hardly think of composing a story without becoming entangled in a web of ultimately relevant digression.

The discussion of italics is amusing and absurd on first view; on reflection, it may seem a logical if an inexcusably banal and tediously literate interpretation of a technical convention. The intelligent reader has something like Barth's digression on italics embedded in his mind, so that when such a form comes into view he automatically knows how to deal with its message. Thus the author's verbosity concerning something as trivial as italics indicates how the *gestalt* of an idea filters

through our consciousness. Once Barth has set up the matrix which encloses our concept of italics, then whenever he uses italics we recall the original framework, which triggers a chain reaction involving all the information we are storing mentally about italics. This process becomes a metaphor for the way language works and also for the essential artifice which the structure of fiction entails.

Digression serves as a continual reiteration of the funhouse of language. It tells us that literature is a synthetic creation, man-made, and establishes that literature, born of language, must return to itself as an entity of words moulded with ideas into a verbal whole. Since the digression is an interruption and seemingly a tonal incongruity as well, it also foils the flow of the "real" story, and thus displays the arbitrary confines of the fictional reality. Hence we are informed that the narrative proper is no more essential to the progress of the "real" world than are the digressions themselves, for the total creation is an artifice of play, a function of imagination, and a suspension of the external world for the game of words:

Ambrose was "at that awkward age." His voice came out high-pitched as a child's if he let himself get carried away; to be on the safe side, therefore, he moved and spoke with *deliberate calm* and *adult gravity*. Talking soberly of unimportant or irrelevant matters and listening consciously to the sound of your own voice are useful habits for maintaining control in this difficult interval. *En route* to Ocean City he sat in the back seat of the family car with his

brother Peter, age fifteen, and Magda G _____, age fourteen, a pretty girl and exquisite young lady who lived not far from them on B _____ Street in the town of D _____, Maryland. Initials, blanks, or both were often substituted for proper names in nineteenth-century fiction to enhance the illusion of reality. It is as if the author felt it necessary to delete the names for reasons of tact or legal liability. Interestingly, as with other aspects of realism, it is an *illusion* that is being enhanced, by purely artificial means. Is it likely, does it violate the principles of verisimilitude, that a thirteen-year-old boy could make such a sophisticated observation? A girl of fourteen is *the psychological coeval* of a boy of fifteen or sixteen; a thirteen-year-old boy, therefore, even one precocious in some other respects, might be three years *her emotional junior* (p. 69-70).

The paradox which Barth illucidates is that realism, though seeking to be "real," is as fictional and illusory as any other mode of fiction, and that it is inherently odd and incongruous for man to want the oxymoron of "real" fictions, for man to place the centre of fiction outside himself instead of in the individual mind. The false grounding in reality that, for example, Defoe used to buttress the acceptability of *Moll Flanders* in 1722, has outlived its original usefulness. Yet Barth's self-consciousness demonstrates that the power of verisimilitude cannot easily be dismissed. It shows that beyond the parody of realism and the ironies of literature lies the uncertainty of the contemporary novelist. Barth's style in "LF" and in *The Sox-Weed Factor* is parodic; it is playing against something which must powerfully exist for the parody to have

sardonic effect.

One weakness of Barth's ludic fiction is that he can posit no replacement for the organic whole of the traditional novel. He decries its implausible plausibility while utilizing its conventions with provisos of parodic explanation crammed behind narrative action and character descriptions. He does not replace it with a new form for fiction, rather with an all-encompassing ironic tone of parodic display. The irony would be more convincing if the need for conventional foils were not so great, the author's dependence on them less overwhelming. Beyond the parody of "LF," one can see the nihilistic inanity of Burroughs' "cut-out-paste-in" novels; the potential is present.

Barth's central commitment to the ludic ethos retrieves him from the fiction of waste, and achieves a solid dialectical method mediating between convention and innovation. Moreover, the action and humour of the story save its thesis from becoming a tendentious, academic one. We follow Ambrose on his journey, we laugh at his impatience and superior knowledge of the car game. We empathize with his adolescent insecurity and the pains of growing up. We are engaged by the lively descriptions of Uncle Karl, Magda, and Ambrose's mother. Despite the author's protests to the contrary -- "Is anything more tiresome, in fiction, than the

problems of sensitive adolescents?" (p. 88) -- the desire of Ambrose for Magda and his awkward sexuality create an amusing and convincing tension. The interruptions are inserted by the author as running tangents yet integrated with the action of Magda eating a banana, Uncle Karl knocking ashes off his cigar on the ventilator window, or the prickling sensation of "plush upholstery" "through gabardine slacks in the July sun" (p. 73). Barth will not let the reader lose sight of the funhouse or its metaphorical import for fiction:

Actually, if one imagines a story called "The Funhouse" or "Lost in the Funhouse," the details of the drive to Ocean City don't seem especially relevant. The *beginning* should recount the events between Ambrose's first sight of the funhouse in the early afternoon and his entering it with Magda and Peter in the evening. The *middle* would narrate all relevant events from the time he goes in to the time he loses his way; middles have the double and contradictory function of delaying the climax while at the same time preparing the reader for it and fetching him to it. The ending would tell what Ambrose does while he's lost, how he finally finds his way out, and what everybody makes of the experience. So far there's been no real dialogue, very little sensory detail, and nothing in the way of a *theme*. And a long time has gone by already without anything happening; it makes a person wonder. We haven't even reached Ocean City yet: we will never get out of the funhouse (p. 74).

The funhouse is the controlling physical object of the "real" side of the story, of the children's trip to Ocean City. Simultaneously, we cannot forget the mental funhouse created for us by the fiction as

both means and product. The digressions and the italics, the reiterated symbols of mirrors, maze, and labyrinth, articulate and promote the Adamic picture of an epistemological funhouse. For the way we come to know the world is a process of consciousness. The source of freedom is the knowledge of the mind's power to create, determining itself and the outside world. The funhouse is not only fun but important because within it the possibilities are limitless. The new Adam may grant himself, through his own creative energy, a renewed garden, a fertile mental landscape in the realm of words and ideas. "LF" is the story of fiction creating an artistic Eden, no more nor less real than any other products of mind and consciousness, of which the world is a primary example. The mind patterns a verbal paradise through the perfections of form and the fine rhythms of language. To be involved in the movement of consciousness toward freedom is thus to be "lost in the funhouse". Barth posits nothing beyond the role of the imagination in the Eden of words. The notion is expansive and transcendent; it possesses the faint breath of the Emersonian vision, and it adumbrates the limitations of plot and convention for the goal of a fiction in which to live.

Just as Ambrose conjures most of the excitement of the funhouse through a plethora of imagined events and hopeful fantasies, the author similarly predicates his

fictional play on the creative interaction between his mental patternings and the imagination of the reader. For the author to perform his role as magus postulating an Edenic realm of play, there must be a responsive consciousness on the part of the reader. The audience must be willing to grant the role of gamesman to the author and to accept the active role of players themselves. In the same way that Ebenezer Cooke engages himself and his consciousness in the games and disguises of Henry Burlingame, or that Nicholas Urfe becomes absorbed in the mental play of Conchis, thus does the reader of "LF" need to abandon himself to the full force of the fictional creation, suspending not only belief but all the requirements of the external world for the world of play. The laugh of Fat May at the entrance to the funhouse, the laugh which "you couldn't hear ... without laughing yourself, no matter how you felt" (p. 76), signifies the ludic base of the Adamic creation and the compelling source of the magus's power to engage man's consciousness in the games of fiction.

As Ambrose wanders in the labyrinth of the funhouse, oblivious of the external world, fully conscious of the realm of play, he patterns a new world created by the force of mind. Here his imagination has plenary control and "the glittering maze" (p. 91) filled with mirrors and illusions absorbs his full attention. He is conscious of a freedom he had not known before. He

is freed from the control of his parents and the need to emulate the example of his older brother. He is freed from the uncomfortable façade he exhibits for Magda. He is alone in the world of play and although lost, he feels calm and unafraid. Being lost in the funhouse means for Ambrose a new consciousness, an Adamic perception which patterns a world separate from Ocean City, away from its postlapsarian confines of time and space, a dirty beach, and unrequited love:

He envisions a truly astonishing funhouse, incredibly complex yet utterly controlled from a great central switchboard like the console of a pipe organ. Nobody had enough imagination. He could design such a place himself, wiring and all, and he's only thirteen years old. He would be its operator: panel lights would show what was up in every cranny of its cunning of its multifarious vastness; a switch-flick would ease this fellow's way, complicate that's, to balance things out; if anyone seemed lost or frightened, all the operator had to do was.

He wishes he had never entered the funhouse. But he had. Then he wishes he were dead. But he's not. Therefore he will construct funhouses for others and be their secret operator -- though he would rather be among the lovers for whom funhouses are designed (p. 93-94).

Ambrose thus is metamorphosed into an artist, a magus patterning a funhouse outside and transcending an unredeemed landscape. Art is the redeemed landscape, the New Eden, which is, on the one hand, an ephemeral vision, and on the other, an eternal hope.

The artistic vision of the New Eden is the guiding motif and central experience controlling not only the

world of "LF" but also the universe of Barth's major novel, *The Sot-Weed Factor*, first published in 1960, seven years before "LF". The later, shorter fiction may be viewed as a less complex instance of the same aesthetic ethos, and as such the later work may be seen to furnish a useful groundwork on which to build an understanding of the labyrinthine and more difficult novel. In both, the protagonists create themselves through a fiction in which they choose to live. Ambrose seeks the Adamic comforts of a funhouse maze and comes to a new idea of himself and a promise for the future he previously doubted. Ebenezer Cooke creates a fiction which he pursues for a lifetime. The fiction becomes his identity. He employs the role of Poet Laureate, and having found a fiction wholly suitable to his temperament and his goals, he forges himself and his experience to the demands of the role. Even as he approaches death the fiction yields a pattern of interest and escape as he revises his *Marylandiad* of sorts, the poem *The Sot-Weed Factor*. Henry Burlingame, of course, is the archetypal magus-figure as he plays on reality with the cunning genius and multifarious disguises of a true illusionist. Ambrose, Eben, and Henry, each creates the pattern of his consciousness from a fiction he imposes on himself and the world. Each lives in an Adamic creation outside the confines of external reality. The separate visions are particularly Edenic as they

focus on an artful world of play.

One source of the complexity of *The Sot-Weed Factor* (hereafter shortened to *Factor*) is the way Barth plays with the Edenic concept itself. He plays with it, he plays against it, he transfers it to art, he removes it from nature, he denies it to the New World, he uses it as motivation for the Old. The Adamic myth is the central foil for the adventure Eben pursues. As the promised land of Lord Baltimore's former colony is shown to be barren ground, we witness geography yielding to the terrain of art to encapsulate the notion of an American Eden. The Adamic myth is the generating force behind the fiction of Eben's search for a poetry by which to live, and of Henry's desire for a primal past denied him. Thus the myth pervades Barth's novel even as it is turned inward to the mind of man, even as it is reversed in the poverty of experience it brings forward. It is in this context that the main parody of *Factor* manifests itself, that the dominant irony bursts forth, and that the sardonic appeal of the work emerges. Barth writes of Eben's Adamic quest with the inherent mirth of one who is aware of a tradition which he amusedly plays with and turns upside down.

As a Professor of English, Barth is fully cognizant of the Adamic model into which *Factor* would be placed, and he thus operates as magus from a position of controlling irony and pervasive self-consciousness.

In the same way that the author plays with the concept of history, he demonstrates that the critical framework of the myth of the American Eden is an illusory fiction about fiction. He postulates all history as false because it imposes itself as an unambiguous, universal, and inflexible analysis of "reality". From Barth's perspective, history is rather a fiction, and cultural myths are illusions imposed by the false truths of questionable accounts and records reflecting limited individual consciousness rather than any outward "reality" about the external world. Barth plays with history as words and with words he creates his own history. Words *qua* words inherit a truth unavailable to "reality". Words pattern an imagined universe, words form the Eden of the mind out of the falsity of history and the cruelty of myths. We cannot challenge the validity of the Adamic realm of mind because consciousness is its source and product and its only touchstone. It does not have to measure up to "reality", for in its essential freedom it stands beyond the measures of the postlapsarian world, in the realm of the Idea, annulling the contradiction between subjectivity and objectivity, as Hegel described it.

There are those who call for the American Adam to assert himself anew, for the expansive joy of the Emersonian vision of a new relationship with nature and fellow man to be implanted in the contemporary mind.

R.W.B. Lewis, in his important study, has concluded on the note of a need for a new "party of hope," which he posits to overtake the age of containment and its ironic, pessimistic point of view. He has -- and I think it a valid issue -- demonstrated the inherent vitality and energy of the Adamic vision and its powerful source of creative ferment. Yet an unrealistic and faintly jingoistic need to "stand up for America" pervades the conclusion of *The American Adam*, as Lewis discusses contemporary fiction:

These novelists do not, of course, write simply in order to keep alive some particular American tradition. Nor is it the tradition they are working in which accounts for their artistic accomplishment. But, taken together along with a few others, the novels I mention do suggest the indestructible vitality of the Adamic vision of life -- and what that vision can contribute to the alchemical process of the narrative art. They suggest that the vision and the process which transforms it can, after all, continue to present us with the means of grasping the special complexities, the buoyant assurance, and the encircling doubt of the still unfolding American scene.⁶

Other critics writing about the dream of the American garden show, as Barth delineates, that the history of the nation has continually belied the myth, and that the myth itself is no more innately American than the scores of European immigrants who brought the hope of Eden with them as they sailed away from the decaying cities

⁶ R.W.B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: U. of Chicago, 1955), p. 198

of the Old World to the (then) green shores of the New. Noble suggests that "ironically, it was the thrust of romantic ideology in Europe which made possible this concept of American exceptionalism".⁷ In this suggestion he is supported by the evidence of Abrams in *Natural Supernaturalism*, that particularly in the aesthetic realm, the Romantic notion of a union between man and nature is capable of nourishing the creative mind and possibly, the Edenic imagination as well.⁸

Even as the writer rejects the geographical or metaphoric possibility of an American paradise, it lingers as a potent and yet-controlling motif, a source of central conflict and tension in fiction. The cumulative weight of the tradition is so great that the writer can scarcely elude its effect. Barth, no less than Nabokov, Bellow, or Mailer, yields to this mythic framework, if only to rebel against it. His hero, Ebenezer Cooke, is an undeniably Adamic figure as he seeks to create and define himself in the innocence and timelessness of the New World. In Noble's terms, Barth is testing "the national faith":

Our major novelists, from James Fenimore

⁷ David W. Noble, *The Eternal Adam and the New World Garden: The Central Myth in the American Novel Since 1830* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1968), p. 4.

⁸ M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 408.

Cooper to Saul Bellow, are public philosophers and theologians who continually test the national faith in an American Adam living in a New World Eden against their experience with the human situation; they must test the validity of innocence as the American condition. Until the national community ceases to define itself as a congregation of earthly saints living outside of historical culture, our novelists have no choice but to make their heroes philosophers and theologians who contrast their initiation into the realities of America with this ideal.⁹

Ludic fiction is Adamic because it is formed in the light of the challenge for man to create his Eden. The novel of play posits the impossibility of the pastoral myth to be realized. Nevertheless, it conveys the energy of that dream, its vitality and spontaneity, and transfers it to the ideal region of mind. Thus the dialectic completes itself. It comes full circle as the myth, begun as an idea in the mind of man and transformed into a call to action in society, returns to itself as an ethos of creative attainment. If the world cannot encompass the ideals of the mind, the mind can yet encompass the world. Barth's fiction, while denying the efficacy and presenting the falsity of the dream of a New World paradise, does nonetheless illustrate the mind's power to create its own Eden and to live in the fictional Eden it has created. Eben Cooke and Henry Burlingame pattern themselves according to their idea of what they want to be; as such they resemble Whitman's central hero who creates and names himself: "For if the hero of *Leaves of Grass* radiates a

⁹ Noble, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

kind of primal innocence in an innocent world, it was not only because he had made that world, it was also because he had begun by making himself."¹⁰

Poirier talks of the thrust in American fiction for the idea to project itself. He demonstrates that American writers have, from the beginning, found an inherent freedom in words, away from society and the external world. This is particularly relevant to the Edenic novel of play since the same dynamic of the primacy of mind is brought forward. The importance of a freedom regulated by consciousness and asserted by the creative power of the fictional imagination informs both the traditional Adamic novel and the ludic fiction of today. We are reminded of the creators of Humbert Humbert, Van Veen, Ambrose, and Ebenezer Cooke, as Poirier discusses the essentially Edenic style of "a distinctive American tradition within English literature":

The books which in my view constitute a distinctive American tradition ... are early, very often clumsy examples of a modernist impulse in fiction: they resist within their pages the forces of environment that otherwise dominate the world. Their styles have an eccentricity of defiance, even if the defiance shows sometimes as carelessness. Cooper, Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, Hawthorne, Mark Twain, James -- they both resemble and serve their heroes by trying to create an environment of "freedom", though as writers their efforts must be wholly in language. The classic American writers try through style temporarily to free the hero (and the reader) from systems, to free them from the pressures of time, biology, economics, and from the social forces which are ultimately the undoing of American heroes ... What

10 Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

distinguishes American heroes of this kind ... is that there is nothing within the real world, or in the systems which dominate it, that can possibly satisfy their aspirations. Their imagination of the self ... has no economic or social or sexual objectification; they tend to substitute themselves for the world.¹¹

Such, then, is the critical heritage which forms an intellectual background for the creation of *Factor*. The thesis of this chapter is that while Barth mimicks and plays ironically with the traditional notions of the Adamic myth, he simultaneously incorporates this myth as a central focus of meaning for his novel, and goes further to postulate the ultimate non-historical, non-geographical ludic realm of the Edenic creation of mind. There is no denying that the hero is a new Adam, for "Ebenezer was born American,"¹² and was nurtured on an unusual love of words and verbal play. In fact, the opening paragraph of this herculean novel establishes Eben's connection with the games of verbal creation and announces his self-appointed role as poet: "In the last years of the Seventeenth Century there was to be found ... one rangy, gangling flitch called Ebenezer Cooke ... who ... had found the sound of Mother English more fun to game with than her sense to labor over, and

¹¹ Richard Poirier, *A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 5.

¹² John Barth, *The Sot-Weed Factor*, rev. ed., (New York: Bantam, 1969), p. 4. All future references are to this edition and will appear in parentheses.

so rather than applying himself to the pains of scholarship, had learned the knack of 'versifying" (p. 3).

The next few pages confirm the aptness of Eben's role as the new Adamic hero of ludic fiction. We are told that one distinguishing feature of the protagonist is his self-effacing behaviour and his innocent outlook. We learn that his favourite pastime as a child was play-acting. Eben and his sister Anna, like Van Veen and Ada, "might spend an autumn morning playing at Adam and Eve out in the orchard," or alternatively, they would "play word-games" (pp. 6-7). The children are thus presented as free creatures in an Edenic child-world of play.

Much is made of Ebenezer's innocence and his naïveté. His purity and his zealous desire to remain a virgin contribute to the bawdy humour of the piece, and illustrate its specific parody of the eighteenth-century novel. Ebenezer's earnestness to maintain his virtue above all else is reminiscent of Richardson's novels *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, and it is clear that one result of Barth's satiric style is to mimick the literary patterns of the early English novelists. Eben assumes the female role of chaste resolve against the encroachments of evil society and the temptations of the flesh. Yet the irony is that for Barth there is no such thing as "virtue rewarded," as there was for the more pious eighteenth-century epistolary novelist.

In this sense *Factor* establishes a kinship with the ludic displays in *Lolita*, *Ada*, and *The French Lieutenant's*

Woman, all of which parody specific traditional novels and poetry. There is a tone of gamesmanship in which the author challenges the reader to fit the contemporary novel into the parodic reference the writer plays against. Fully to play this literary game the audience must be cognizant of the early English novel. A familiarity with the picaresque tales of Fielding will, for instance, create an additional centre of enlightened amusement for the reader of *Factor*. A knowledge of Fielding's theory of the comic-epic, conceived in the introduction to *Joseph Andrews*, and an awareness of the idea of history which he articulates in *Tom Jones*, will provide the contemporary audience with a deeper perception of the parodic and satiric motivation of the verbal games in which Barth indulges. The games exist for themselves in the dynamic of ludic fiction and the funhouse of language, but they cannot be fully appreciated without knowledge of the conventions and traditions forming the source material of play. There is no question that the average reader will miss much.

If Eben is the innocent Adam thrust upon the world with himself as his only resource, the world upon which he is projected lacks any propinquity to Eden. The Cambridge of the late seventeenth-century is described as a den of iniquity, with some of the eminent men of the day reduced to buggery and acts of sexual perversion. Barth indulges himself in the games of ironic reversal

as he creates Henry Moore and Isaac Newton as lecherous subjects for Eben's commination, who prey on the bodies of the young men at Trinity College. Barth allows the excesses of human nature to overtake any ostensible veracity.

London comes across as a city of ubiquitous vice and scrofulousness. It is a centre for pimping, prostitution, and colonial intrigue. The pub frequented by Eben is an unlikely haunt for an innocent young man wishing to remain so. His Adamic nature is hard pressed by the rough demands of city life. Much of the humour of the early chapters is generated by Eben's steadfast ignorance of the ways of the world and his totally unconvincing transcendence of it. Not a stupid lad, the protagonist is yet uncommonly obtuse. Barth's overstatement of Eben's natural innocence forms a central parody throughout the novel, wherein the writer attenuates the Adamic myth by showing its patent absurdity and its lack of cogency as *modus operandi*. Hyperbole is thus incorporated as an important aspect of style. The focus is not on the destruction of the myth but rather on the games which can be played with it and the general parodic fun involved.

Ebenezer begins his quest for the New World on the most inauspicious of terms. He is turned out by his father much like Adam in *Paradise Lost*, and presented with one last chance of redeeming himself. Nearly

penniless, he is on his own against the world. Henry offers assistance, but his help is of a most dubious nature and seems to spell only more trouble for the hero. The chronology of hardships is intense with threats against his life. Chapter Fourteen alone presents an absurd excess of problems challenging the Adamic optimism of the hero: *"The Laureate Is Exposed to Two Assassinations of Character, a Piracy, a Near-Deflowering, a Near-Mutiny, a Murder, and an Appalling Colloquy Between Captains of the Sea, All Within the Space of a Few Pages"* (p. 258). We cannot take the horror seriously and of course, we are not meant to. The ironic tone of the work assures that the audience will fully suspend belief in the conventions of realism and verisimilitude, that they will accept the parody for what it is, that they will appreciate how well Barth can play the game.

Despite his sufferings and misfortunes, Ebenezer is filled with joy at the prospect of writing poetry and hailing the pristine quality of the New World. Like Adam and Eve at the threshold of the primal garden, he is, as an artist, still "dizzy with the beauty of the possible" (p. 12). Notwithstanding the numerous trials which Barth renders in full picaresque, comic-epic detail, Eben retains a sense of wonder. The key to Ebenezer's resilience in the face of near-disaster is his sense of identity as a poet. In him, Adam and the

poet are fused. Everywhere he goes, Eben announces his role as Poet Laureate with the unquestioning confidence of the Adamic hero secure in the limitless possibilities of the future. As the poet for the pastoral landscape of America, Eben compares his role with that of Virgil and he announces his fervour to extol the fineness of the New World garden which the house of Calvert will transform into an ideal example of the middle landscape mediating between European civilization and the untamed wilds:

"Trees felled, towns raised, a very nation planted in the wilds" (p. 83). When this original conception is turned on its head in the wars, vices, antinomy, and chaos which confront Ebenezer in the New World, he transfers his Adamic commitment to the artistic pursuit. Virtually held a prisoner at Malden, in the midst of a drug and prostitution ring, he achieves his finest hour as a poet in composing the jeremiad entitled *The Sot-Weed Factor*.

Clearly, poetry becomes the New Eden for Ebenezer as the inability of any land or territory to fulfill that claim is made manifest. And ironically, it is this poem decrying the New World Eden which dialectically asserts itself on the European mind and foments anew the Adamic search in the mind of the potential emigrant. The idea returns to itself as the creation of a verbal Eden and as such, it focuses a powerful declaration to the world. Critics in London hail the poem as a satiric triumph and they are generous with encomiums about "its rhymes and

wit ... the characterizations and the farcical action". The poem is praised as both an interesting example of verbal play and an unquestionable instance of the fruits of the New World Eden, as one writer observed: "*It is a curious thing that Baltimore, so anxious to persuade us of the elegance of his former Palatinate, should so hardly use that Palatinate's first Poet, when the very poem he despises is our initial proof of Maryland's refinement*" (p. 816). Eden is maintained through the resources of art. Moreover, for the poet and his audience, the aesthetic act not only structures the patterns of reality; the Adamic consciousness makes freedom possible as the poetic experience creates the world. Barth, like Whitman and Wallace Stevens, postulates the role of poet as prime creator, the magus in the garden:

We have become familiar ... with the notion of the poet as the magician who "orders reality" by his use of language. That notion derived originally from the epochal change -- wrought chiefly by Kant and Hegel -- in the relation between the human mind and the external world; a change whereby the mind "thought order into" the sensuous mass outside it instead of detecting an order externally existing. Whitman ... adapted that principle to artistic creativity with a vigor and enthusiasm unknown before James Joyce ... What is implicit in every line of Whitman is the belief that the poet *projects* a world of order and meaning and identity into either a chaos or a sheer vacuum; he does not *discover* it. The poet may salute the chaos; but he creates the world.¹³

13 Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

Henry Burlingame is the other prime creator in the novel, and his role is crucial as it delineates the ways of the magus. As Ebenezer's childhood tutor and indeed his guide throughout the tale, Henry sets the pattern for the prototypical gamesman, trickster, and player. Henry is the magus *par excellence*, for his life is a series of games and play as he changes personalities and throws off identities faster than Eben changes clothes. He is similar to Conchis in *The Magus* as he converts from one role to another, creating himself anew each time. Henry exuberantly projects to Eben the gift for formulating a new self, an ability which not only once causes Eben to ask himself "whether I am Magus, Messiah, Lazarus, or the Prodigal" (p. 517). Yet Ebenezer follows Henry's lead in asserting the artistic capacity to bring forward a new reality in which to live, a reality posited by the creative resources of mind. Henry has the grand artistic hubris to pattern the world from his image of himself. The consciousness of the moment determines life for Burlingame and generates the disguises and fictions through which he challenges the external world. Eben must corroborate for himself the efficacy of Burlingame's fictions and the transcendent power of the imagination, even as he hopes for an ultimate, answerable reality:

"Thou'rt not John Coode thyself?" Anna asked half seriously.

Henry shrugged. "I have been, now and

again; for that matter, I was once Francis Nicholson for half a day, and three Mattawoman tarts were ne'er the wiser. But this I'll swear; albeit 'tis hard for me to think such famous wights are pure and total fictions, to this hour I've not laid eyes on either Baltimore or Coode. It may be they are all that rumor swears: devils and demigods, whichever's which; or it may be they're simple clotpolls like ourselves, that have been legend'd out of reasonable dimension; or it may be they're naught but the rumors and tales themselves."

"If that last is so," Ebenezer said, "Heav'n knows 'twere a potent life enough! When I reflect on the weight and power of such fictions beside my poor shade of a self, that hath been so much disguised and counterfeited, methinks they have tenfold my substance!" (pp. 763-64).

On many occasions it is the games of Henry which rescue Eben from the brink of disaster. Inasmuch as Eben lives in a self-created world of poetry, it can be said that the games of disguise and the fictions of identity preserve for him the Adamic realm. Games predicate an Eden beyond the external world. Playing Lord Balitmore, Henry officiates at Eben's birth as a poet and offers confirmation of Eben's quest for the New World paradise and the artistic garden. Throughout the dangers and adventures in the journey of Eben, it is the sustaining power of the game which saves him from defeat and destruction. Fictions are the central anodyne of Ebenezer's life. By pretending to be Bertrand, he is able to reach the shores of America. By accepting the fictions of Burlingame as Colonel Sayer, John Coode, Tim Mitchell, and Nicholas Lowe, the poet is rescued

each time from imminent threats. And indeed, it is the supreme fiction of poetry which most often calls Ebenezer back to the safety of the mental preserve. At Malden the resources of poetry save Eben from becoming an indentured servant, and the last fiction of Eben's life, that Burlingame is in his midst as a new Nicholas Lowe, preserves for him a stability and continuity. Ebenezer is bequeathed by Henry a last fiction in which to live.

Much of the story is devoted to Burlingame's fictions, the disguises of a master gamesman. Burlingame's life demonstrates the power of imagination to transform reality and by so doing, he shows Eben the verbal road to paradise. As a magus figure, Henry inherits a love of words and verbal play. Thus his life as a seaman, just as Eben's job as a clerk in London, proves unsatisfactory. He becomes a street singer, is adopted by a group of gypsies, decides to become a scholar at Cambridge, supports himself as a tutor to Eben and Anna, and finally assumes the multifarious disguises and games of the master spy and creative intriguer. Burlingame is the Adamic figure who plays at creating a world which defies reality as he first creates himself from his own Platonic image. It is Burlingame who initiates the discussion about the primacy of imagination. An early exchange between the two heroes puts forward the opposing claims of reality and fiction. Henry of course offers a cogent argument for the

dominance of the mind over the external world, for the primacy of the mental realm and the fictions it creates. Burlingame, like the contemporary novelist, turns conventions upside down. The controlling metaphor remains the game and the skill of the artificer:

"Nay, 'tis to the point. Suppose today I'd claimed to be Burlingame, for all my alteration, and composed a line to fit your quatrain ... suppose I'd challenged your own identity, and made *you* out to be the clever imposter. At best you'd have no proof, would you now?"

"I grant I would not," Ebenezer admitted ...

"... If I had learned aught of your past, however, the discrepancies could be charged to your own poor posing ... And if I brought a few of your friends in on the game, or even old Andrew and your sister, to disclaim you, I'll wager even you would doubt your authenticity."

"Mercy, mercy!" Ebenezer cried. "No more of these tenuous hypotheses, lest I lose my wits! ..."

"True enough," Burlingame said good-humoredly. "I wished only to establish that all assertions of *thee* and *me*, e'en to oneself, are acts of faith impossible to verify."

"I grant it; I grant it. 'Tis established like the _____" He waved his hand uncertainly. "Marry, your discourse hath robbed me of similes: I know of naught immutable and sure!"

"'Tis the first step on the road to Heaven," Burlingame smiled (pp. 140-41).

The theme of tenuous reality versus created fiction is one which Burlingame uses to challenge Eben, and is similarly projected by the author as a central ambiguity for his audience to ponder. Barth as narrator leaves

the door slightly ajar as to whether Eben's last fiction really is a delusion. As for John Coode, both hero and villain of the tale, Eben and Barth pose the question, "Did the 'real' John Coode exist at all independently of his several impersonators, or was he merely a fiction created by his supposed collaborators ...?" (p. 814).

The dense anfractuositities of the story seem to indicate the Hegelian notion that no external world can exist apart from the mind's power to create it. As Burlingame assures Ebenezer, "'The world's a happy climate for imposture'". He goes on to conclude, "'Tis but to say what oft I've said to you ere now, Eben: your true and constant Burlingame lives only in your fancy, as doth the pointed order of the world'" (p. 357).

Barth repeats this point many times. It is a central idea of his theory of fiction and it is of the utmost significance for consciousness. Just as the force of Eben's imagination as he looks at the night sky makes him think he will fall into it, the palpable reality is the one we create for ourselves, or alternatively, the one the artist creates for us. This is the function of the ludic novel as it posits an Adamic realm in which man temporarily becomes absorbed. The play realm of art is the mediating link between the harshness of external reality, the betrayals of fiction, and the Adamic conatus of consciousness. Eben happily concludes, as does Barth, with a fiction superseding reality as an

anodyne for the limitations of that reality, as a last source of freedom: "'I shall make the piece a fiction! I'll be a tradesman, say -- nay, a factor that comes to Maryland on's business, with every good opinion of the country, and is swindled of his goods and property. All my trials I'll reconceive to suit the plot and alter just enough to pass the printer!'" (p. 494).

Man's final recourse, as Barth sees it, is to the play of words in fiction. When the dialectic of the novel completes itself, we are left with the fiction of words. Words thus assume for the contemporary writer of ludic fiction an ultimate primacy, a crucial importance. Like Nabokov, Pynchon and Fowles, Barth pursues words not only for the ideas they convey but as things in themselves, entities which sparkle when placed in the right light. Part of Barth's quest as a writer is the self-conscious task of utilizing words for their maximum effect, in the proper context, with the correct syntax, but more than this, he extends the goal of exposing the beauty and infinite variability and richness of the language. It is not unusual, then, that Barth should write novels, publish them, and in subsequent years, work on revising them. He has altered the ending of *The Floating Opera* and rewritten parts of *Factor*. In the latter case he explains his objective as "merely, where possible, to make this long narrative a quantum swifter and more graceful" (Foreword to *Second*

Edition).

Just as Ambrose enjoys the mirrors, mazes, and labyrinths in the funhouse at Ocean City, Ebenezer and Henry also love the reflections, distortions, and allusions that the play with words involves. Eben's idea of a poet is one who plays with the conceits and traditions of language, one who toys with words as children play-act through the richness of their imagination. Indeed, his nurture of verbal delights may be seen as an extension of the Edenic world of childhood play carried into the adult world. As Robert Neale stresses, "'To have a playtime and playground with a story to tell and a game to play is to have a life of adventure that surpasses all description ... What happens to the child in play can happen to the adult. And when it does, paradise is present.'"¹⁴

Certainly for Eben and for Henry words never lose their power to thrill and to excite with primal energy and natural beauty. Ebenezer, like the novelist, is more than amused by words; they sustain him. Poetry is his *raison d'être*. Barth cannot help undercutting the seriousness with which Ebenezer pours out hackneyed verse and trite fustian. Hence he exerts a strong ludic tone as he has the protagonist dilate upon the

¹⁴ Robert Neale, quoted by David L. Miller in *Gods and Games: Toward a Theology of Play* (New York: World Publishing, 1969), p. 115.

sublime characteristics of poesy. If the hero enshrines poetry, then the author strips it of exaltation and removes it to the funhouse. Ebenezer's poetic pomposity as the new Laureate is a bauble the novelist must match with his games of parody:

"LOCKET'S!" CRIED EBENEZER to his cabman ... With what a suddenness had he scaled the reaches of Parnassus, while his companions blundered in the foothills! Snatching out his commission, he read again the sweet word *Laureat* and the catalogue of Maryland's excellencies.

"Sweet land!" he exclaimed. "Pregnant with song! Thy deliverer approacheth!"

There was a conceit worth saving, he reflected: the word *deliverer*, for instance, with its twin suggestions of midwife and savior ... He lamented having no pen nor any paper other than Baltimore's commission, which after kissing he tucked away in his coat.

"I must purchase me a notebook," he decided. "'Twere a pity such wildflowers should die unplucked. No more may I think merely of my own delight, for a laureate belongs to the world" (p. 104).

Much significant dialogue between Eben and Henry centres on the word, and on the games they can play with language. Poetry was at first a hallowed pantheon for Eben; for Henry it was always a funhouse. The funhouse is replete with mirrors of intense reflection. Burlingame emphasizes the importance of meaning and of technique. He cautions, "'You must attend the *how* of 't'" (p. 146). He shows that the gaming is never arbitrary or wasteful; that levels of meaning ripple the surface of words, that play betrays neither intensity nor depth. The irony

is that Eben, nascent poet that he is, formulates conceits but does not always probe meaning. Sometimes he is unaware of the multiplicities of thought to be found in his verse. In addition to establishing irony and suggesting a parodic counterpoint, Henry as audience supplies meaning. This creative interchange between poet and audience is a basic postulate of the verbal Eden. The readers must possess a capacity for wonder and for play which the aesthetic process is able to engage. Like ludic fiction, Eben's poetry and the many fictions within the fiction only assert their power inasmuch as they generate a creative response from the audience. The organism of poetry grows and expands as both author and audience challenge each other in play:

"... 'tis but a *different* view ye get as author. Nor am I the dullest of readers: I quite appreciate the wordplays in your first quatrain, for instance."

"Wordplays? What wordplays?"

"Why, *chaste Penelope*, for one," Sayer /Henry/ said. "What better pun for a wife plagued twenty years by suitors? 'Twas a clever choice!"

"Thank you," Ebenezer murmured.

"And *Andromache's bouncing boy*," Sayer went on, "that was pitched from the walls of Ilium_____"

"Nay, 'tis grotesque!" Ebenezer protested. "I meant no such thing!"

"Not so grotesque. It hath the salt of Shakespeare."

"Do you think so?" Ebenezer reconsidered the phrase in his mind. "Haply it doth at that. Nonetheless you read more out than I put in."

"'Tis but to admit," Sayer said, "I read more out than *you* read out, which was my claim. Your poem means more to me."

"I'faith, I've not the means to refute you!" Ebenezer declared. "If thou'rt a true sample of my fellow planters, sir, then Maryland must be the muse's playground, and a paradise for poets!..." (p. 135).

Perhaps the quintessential illustration of the verbal game in *Factor* is the chapter devoted to the discussion of the Hudibrastic. To the modern reader the Hudibrastic is an arcane form. But in the later seventeenth-century it was a popular and amusing entity. Significantly, the Hudibrastic is closely associated with games and play, as it is conspicuous for its humourous quality of mock-epic, satire, and burlesque. Samuel Butler initiated this iambic-tetrameter, rhyming-couplet form with bold, outrageous rhymes which took one off guard since they were slightly jolting and irregular, and somehow, deliberately, not quite right. The Hudibrastic is like the mirror in the funhouse -- reflected in it, "reality" is more lively, thoroughly playful, because the image is slightly, humorously, awry. On another level, the Hudibrastic functions as a metaphor for the ludic ethos of contemporary fiction. Barth postulates it as a symbol of the gaming interchange between poet and audience. This is finely adumbrated in the rhyming exchange between the whores

at Malden and most particularly, in Chapter Twenty-Six of Part Two, in both the agonistic engagement between Eben and Henry and the rhyming impossibility of "month". Playfulness is the dominant tone in the Hudibrastic lesson Eben is pleased to give Henry:

"'Tis kind of you to praise the piece," Ebenezer said. "Haply 'twill be a part of the *Marylandiad*."

"I would I could turn a verse so well. But say, while 'tis fresh in my mind, doth *persons* really rhyme with *versions*, and folk with *soak'd*?"

"Indeed yes," the poet replied.

"But would it not be better," Burlingame persisted cordially, "to rhyme *versions* with *dispersions*, say, and *folk* with *soak*? Of course, I am no poet."

"One need not be a hen to judge an egg," Ebenezer allowed. "The fact of 't is, the rhymes you name are at once better and worse than mine: better, because they sound more nearly like the words they rhyme with; and worse, because such closeness is not the present fashion. *Dispersion* and *version*: 'tis wanting in character, is't not? But *person* and *version* -- there is surprise, there is color, there is wit! In fine, there is a perfect Hudibrastic" (p. 410).

Gaming with literature is for Barth, as for his characters, not only the process of fiction but the product as well. As Eben uses "the sot-weed factor conceit" (p. 498) to structure his major poem, so the author also employs this conceit as the grand design and symbol of his novel, for it is in "the sot-weed factor conceit" that art and artifice become joined in the synthesis of play. The funhouse of words and

language provides the ground for the verbal garden of fiction, the imagined Eden beyond the confines of the external world, beyond the disappointments of Malden and the oil-clogged waters of Ocean City. Like the differences in the journals of Sir Henry Burlingame and Captain John Smith, the ambiguity of contemporary ludic fiction enshrines the power of imagination and consciousness to pattern the world. It exalts the truly Edenic creative possibilities of man, demonstrating the capability of mind, and corroborating the remarkable freedom of a paradise lost in the funhouse of language.

CHAPTER SIX

The Magus: Freedom in the Verbal Eden

The imaged Word, it is that holds
 Hushed willows anchored in its glow.
 It is the unbetrayable reply
 Whose accent no farewell can know.

"Voyages," Hart Crane

Grounded in the real world, *The Magus* is never confined by it, for Fowles, like Barth, explicitly probes the possibilities of the imagined world and the creative act. The central thrust of the novel transcends any consideration of verisimilitude. Fowles presents a panorama of the modern world. He chronicles two world wars, personalities from the Third Reich and the Greek Resistance; he pays homage to the conditions of existential man. There is a deliberate attempt at internationalization among characters. Black man, American, European all take part. The cast includes hundreds, if not thousands, and the fabric of the twentieth century is probed and discussed. History plays an important part. Both Conchis and Urfe represent the character of their respective generation. Yet for all these sometimes laborious efforts on the part of the author to ground his fictive world in the appearance of reality, the most striking feature of this novel is its ultimate obliviousness to time and space and the demands of quotidian life. No thematic perceptions are pushed out into the real world. For all the political

talk, politics is seen as an irrelevance.

What matters, what is given significance, is the labyrinthine mystery of the unique created world at Bourani. Conchis offers Nicholas a masque in which to live, a world of players, games, and acting. Against the rich created ambience of Bourani, Nicholas' previous life seems paltry, and Nicholas equally small in relation to its vast mysteries and cosmic allure. The novel is conceived as an elaborate *rite de passage*, but unlike the traditional work of its kind, it only minimally seeks to project its protagonist, converted and transformed, toward a superior capacity for dealing with the problems of life or society. The aim is more centrally aesthetic as freedom for the individual becomes integrated with the artistic consciousness. Conchis re-educates Nicholas in terms of an artistic sensibility. Art, not life, is the ultimate goal, the supreme quest. In a parallel fashion Fowles, as the writer-magus, wants to propose for the reader the insular rhythms of the self-contained, self-limiting pageant.

The importance of the creative act dominates the aesthetic beliefs of John Fowles. It forms an obsessive impetus. The quest toward the primacy of words and the lexical Eden impelled the author to revise the original novel eleven years after its first publication in 1966. In his Foreword to the new edition of *The Magus* Fowles notes, "Though this is not, in any major thematic or

narrative sense, a fresh version of *The Magus*, it is rather more than a stylistic revision. A number of scenes have been largely re-written, and one or two new ones invented".¹ In the interest of a new audience or perhaps new purchases by a large old audience (with the revised version in hardback making the best seller lists in both American and Britain in 1977), Fowles overstates the impact of the revised edition. For our purposes in this chapter, the revisions serve only to underscore the Edenic main currents of the fiction and to corroborate our arguments. As Fowles continues in the Foreword:

No correlative whatever of my fiction, beyond the above, took place on Spetsai during my stay. What ground the events of the book have in reality came after I had returned to England. I had escaped Circe, but the withdrawal symptoms were severe. I had not then realized that loss is essential for the novelist, immensely fertile for his books, however painful to his private being. This unresolved sense of a lack, a missed opportunity, led me to graft certain dilemmas of a private situation in England on the memory of the island and its solitudes, which became increasingly for me the lost Eden, the *domaine sans nom* of Alain-Fournier -- even Bevis's farm, perhaps. Gradually my protagonist, Nicholas, took on, if not the true representative face of a modern Everyman, at least that of a partial Everyman of my own class and background. There is a private pun in the family name I gave him. As a child I could not pronounce *th* except as *ʃ*, and Urfe really stand for Earth -- a coining that long preceded the convenient connection with Honoré d'Urfé and *L'Astrée*.²

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1 John Fowles, *The Magus: A Revised Version* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977), p. 5.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Doubtless there will be studies examining the significance of the differences between the original and the revised *The Magus*. This, however, is not one of them. Textual comparisons between the two books can and ought to be made, but they do not strike this reader as central to an understanding of the fiction beyond one fundamental proviso: that the nature of Fowles's act of revision acknowledges the pressing commitment of ludic fiction to formal matters and to a resolution in verbal patterns. Despite Fowles's disclaimer, his changes are hardly substantive; they are more those of the conjurer sorting his cards -- the order is slightly different but the substance remains essentially the same. We are reminded of a similar pursuit by Nabokov while readying his Russian novels for publication in English; he wanted to polish his verbal gems before presenting them to the English-speaking public and sought to eliminate all signs of youthful folly and literary immaturity. Fowles avers about *The Magus*: "it must always substantially remain a novel of adolescence written by a retarded adolescent".³ He is perhaps too harsh with himself in order that the reader will not be. Clearly, the efforts of ludic writers to perfect their works long after initial publication signify an absorption with the creative act *per se* and an unwillingness to depart from the fictional garden of play.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

What Fowles does in *The Magus* and in the act of revision, is to posit the artistic creation as its own best world. No attempt is made to demonstrate life outside it as worth anything but a trifle as much as the rich, warm patterns in the carpet of the creation. Thus life creates a world for art, and not the other way around. Aesthetic consciousness precipitates full being. The Eden of the mind, that perfect world of pleasure, pain, and perception, exists as the only significant reality. To this end, Conchis presents for Nicholas, as Fowles presents for the reader, the brilliant masque of Bourani, with its hundreds of actors and many splendid illusions. Nicholas arrives on Phraxos an empty, serious, and mundane young man. He takes things at their face value and he is literal to a pedantic degree. He writes bad poetry, and he yearns for an artistic capability which does not assert itself. For Conchis, all this makes Nicholas an ideal subject, and the liberties which Conchis takes with Nicholas are to an obvious degree those same liberties which Fowles perpetrates on his equally unsuspecting readers. Conchis and Fowles deliberately thwart any attempt at ultimate explanation or meaning. Nicholas greets the domaine of Conchis with quizzical resignation: "I was back in a polysemantic world" (p. 267). The mystery is the meaning and the reality is in the mind. Once again, nothing exists but that we think it does. The mind provides

both platform and audience. The seeker claims his Eden, and the Eden he claims is the free play of his own mind, the aesthetic gratification of image and word. With this goal, Conchis stands as Epicurean man holding forth the mental beauty, the serenity, of the created world.

This Eden of the mind, the playground of artifice and invention, of games and laughter, determines the imagery, setting, and tone of the novel. The movement is away from the confines of English society to the freedom of the Hellenic world. The cradle of Western thought, Greece is now a playground. Always an Arcadia, Greece pulsates with the untrammelled life of Eden. The choice of setting is a conscious one and works on many levels. It is Edenic in that it presents a natural world untainted by the ravages of time. Indeed, Conchis makes the point that even during the terror of the German occupation of the island, Bourani escaped harm. Clearly, the world of Conchis is a protected paradise, wherein both art and nature have free rein. And if anyone has the power to re-create the Golden Age, that man is Maurice Conchis. He moulds nature and art into a perfect symmetry. With his resources of wealth, culture, and intellect, Conchis is able to create a unique synthesis of art with nature. One is reminded of a comment by Polixenes in *The Winter's Tale*: "this is an art/Which does mend nature, change it rather, but/The art itself

is nature (IV, iii, 94). Without the resources of his Hellenic paradise, without fauna and flora and the power of water, beach, and sky, the mask/masque of the magus and his troupe would fall rather flat. The mystery evaporates when that setting is lost; and then this Eden becomes internalized in a new consciousness. The transference is complete; one is sustained by the mind's image.

The games and tricks in *The Magus* echo Nabokovian intellectual flirtations with the reader. If Nicholas feels trapped in a maze, like Theseus, so does the unsuspecting reader. It is hard to "get the story straight". Again, the polysemantic world foils one's attempts to pin down reality. The traditional novel is used as a foil, for when one finally feels he grasps the plot, Fowles, through the figure of the magus, turns it upside down again. The act of creation is the essential thing; the performance matters, not the analysis. If Nabokov gives the reader chess problems to figure out, or at least to dally with, Fowles presents us with the great puzzle of Bourani to try to piece together. That is, we, like Nicholas, feel compelled to analyze, and Fowles is happy to engage us in the game if we like. Conchis points out, however, that it is only when one can get past the calculation and the analysis, that one can know the essence. The interesting paradox is that no matter how intensely

Conchis/Fowles pushes against the claims of interpretation, and the rational utility of language, the work of art cannot exist without the search for meaning. That is why Nicholas makes a good subject for Conchis's experimentation. His dogmatic lust to know sustains him when the game is about to exhaust itself. Beyond the game is the word and the world it creates; this is the meaning. Bradbury elucidates the ludic and gamesman-like dimension of Fowles's fiction:

So of course the real Magus in the novel is the novelist himself. The creation of myth in our modern employment of language is itself a precarious exercise. We use language to explore contingent reality and not to create systematic and numinous orders. But the rationalistic use of language (here roughly associated with Urfe) implies no logic, no structural unity Fowles's purpose in the novel is therefore to create a context of illusion and a language of illusion which has the capacity to go beyond theatrical play and display and actually create structural myths. This, by confronting and connecting the world of rationalism and the world of illusion, feeding the former into the latter and then withdrawing it in its incompleteness, he does. Urfe's dilemma is at the beginning of the book that of loss of structure ... And the Magus, whatever his deceptions, provides precisely that -- a structure for feeling art, and history, which makes possible not only a fantastic world beyond 'reality' but art itself. In order to create this awareness, Fowles has in the book effectively to create another language or at least another order of notation. To do that, a large part of the action of the book has to develop in a world of feigning, convention, stylization, which we historically associate with high art, art as play and display.⁴

⁴ Malcolm Bradbury, *Possibilities: Essays on the State of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 270.

The whole process of converting Nicholas to the meaning and the mystery of art is a self-conscious enterprise for players and creator. One weakness of the novel lies in the problem of this intense authorial self-consciousness becoming an artificial presence in the work. This is especially true of Fowles's elaborate attempt to ground the novel in cultural context and literary allusion. For example, the belaboured explanations of Artemis lose in subtlety what they mean to convey in symbolic aura. The many reference-book comments which Fowles, through the researches of Nicholas, presents to the audience only contribute to an artificiality which cloy the reader. It is as if Fowles tells us to read each chapter side by side a comparable one from *The Golden Bough*, yet he is without the ability to integrate such material with his story. Such is manufactured invention at its worst. Fowles is confined by the limitations of his aesthetic in the same way that the device of the stage and the dramatic charade of set-piece acting boxes in *Conchis*. The self-preoccupation of magus and author may mean the stultification of the reader. The way around this is outside, and neither magus nor author seeks that route. The result is internalized jargon and a self-absorbed style. Graff speaks to Fowles's dilemma when he comments, "The writer's problem is to find a standpoint from which to represent the diffuse, intransigent material of

contemporary experience without surrendering critical perspective to it".⁵

To postulate his idea of art, Fowles presents a veritable panorama of cultural references. Often the function of these cultural references is to merge life with art. For example, the landscape of Bourani is described, in Nicholas' first person narrative, with painterly expansiveness in terms of a Claude canvas: "When I reached the central ridge, I looked back. From that particular point the house was invisible, but I knew where it lay. The sea and the mountains floated in the steady evening sunshine. It was all peace, elements and void, golden air and mute blue distances, like a Claude ..."⁶ Nicholas recognizes the painting above Conchis's mantlepiece to be a Modigliani reproduction. Conchis corrects him; it is an original Modigliani and the woman portrayed is Conchis's mother, who figures in the story. The staring brown eyes which dominate the picture belong to Conchis. This image delineates the magus's ever-watchful control, even when the pictures are shown to be fakes. Again, in Conchis's bedroom, art probes reality and confers life. Art, not life, is the determining factor in Conchis's inner sanctum:

5 Gerald Graff, *Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 238.

6 John Fowles, *The Magus* (New York: Dell, 1973), p. 67. All future references are to this edition of the 1966 original novel and will appear in parentheses.

But its tone was really set by its two paintings: both nudes, girls in sunlit interiors, pinks, reds, greens, honeys, ambers; all light, warmth, glowing like yellow fires with life, humanity, domesticity, sexuality, Mediterraneity.

"You know him?" I shook my head. "Bonnard. He painted both of them five or six years before he died." I stood in front of them. He said, behind me, "These, I paid for."

"They were worth it."

"Sunlight. A naked girl. A chair. A towel, a bidet. A tiled floor. A little dog. And he gives the whole of existence a reason."

I stared at the one on the left, not the one he had inventoried. It showed a girl by a sunlit window with her back turned, apparently drying her loins and watching herself in the mirror at the same time. I was remembering Alison, Alison wandering about the flat, naked, singing, like a child. It was an unforgettable painting; it set a dense golden halo of light round the most trivial of moments, so that the moment, and all such moments, could never be completely trivial again (p. 93).

It is interesting to note that Nicholas finds the painting unforgettable insofar as it informs his experience of felt life. That is, the painting engenders an aesthetic response which in turn prompts Nicholas to re-evaluate his experience with Alison. This is, in microcosm, exactly what Conchis hopes to do on a larger scale. Life is predicated on the aesthetic moment.

Art induces a consciousness which forms an Eden of the mind. As the acting magus, Conchis maintains a powerful artistic overview. As the magus-in-the-making, the potential creator, Nicholas also perceives life as an essentially artistic pageant. This may reduce both

people and nature to a figment of the artistic imagination. In a particularly amusing passage, as night brings solitude to Bourani, Nicholas comments, "Outside, the crickets chirped monotonously, with a Webern-like inconsistency yet precision of rhythm" (p. 98). Conchis describes Lily, his putative childhood sweetheart, in specifically artistic terms: "Lily. She had, yes, I suppose a Botticelli beauty, long fair hair, gray-violet eyes. But that makes her sound too pale, too Pre-Raphaelite" (p. 111). Nicholas tells us that Conchis renders Bach on the harpsichord, not in a modern capacity or in a contemporary interpretation, but rather as the master himself would have done. Nicholas considers Lily to be acting "like a heroine in Chekhov" (p. 270). Conchis manipulates all his players with the controlling force of the dramatist. Much is said of his power to reduce people to puppets. This dynamic also predicates Nicholas' behaviour with others. Similarly, the author falls afoul of his own method, for he reduces the characters to fulfill his aesthetic goal.

The merit of the novel, and it is considerable, lies in the primary force of its aesthetic theme, which, in turn, is brought to the front by the categoric rendering mentioned above. Fowles pays homage to a cultural tradition. If frequent conscious artfulness becomes fulsome, Fowles's style at its best is an effective defense against this. Often, the author's

sardonic wit will serve a swift deflation to Nicholas' studied pedanticism, as in the Webern comment. Frequently, the aesthetic motifs rise to a lyrical power and bring forward the Edenic image with skilful appropriateness. Bonnard's form a central reference point, and it is, specifically, the playful ambience of Eden which unobtrusively strikes the reader. The lightness of touch and the vibrancy of colours are, in this context, exactly right. The Bonnard's signify play and pleasure, and it is this playfulness of Eden which solidifies the essential artistry of the lost world which Conchis seeks to re-create as an Adamic perception in Nicholas:

Those Bonnard's, their eternal outpouring of a golden happiness, haunted me; they were like windows on a world I had tried to reach all my life, and failed; they had reminded me of Alison, or rather of the best of my relationship with Alison, before; and now they bred a kind of Watteau-like melancholy in me, the forevergoneness of pictures like *L'Embarcation pour Cythère*. As if Bonnard had captured a reality so real that it could not exist; or only as a dream, a looking back and seeing where the way was lost and if it had not been lost but it had been lost ... then I thought of Julie. One day I should see her so, naked at a sunlit window; my naked wife (p. 369).

The controlling leitmotif, the central Edenic image, of the novel is that of "the smile". It receives a particular aesthetic impetus early on, when Conchis presents the ancient stone face to Nicholas, in order for him to absorb its mystery. We recognize this, "the Leonardo smile" (p. 430), as the smile of all those who are touched by the mystery and wisdom of the Bourani

masque. Even Mitford, the failed initiate, is possessed by the smile. It is the image most clearly identified with Conchis and his role of artist as magus. Lily has the capacity for this gifted smile; her mother possesses its serenity. Alison greets Nicholas with it on her reappearance. Even Nicholas, the difficult smiler, begins to know its meaning by the conclusion. The ubiquitous smile is the motif which classifies and explains the moral, or anti-moral, of the fiction. With his back framed in the sunlight of Arcadia, Nicholas is introduced to it by the magus:

"Go and sit at the table. With your back to the sun."

In a minute he appeared, carrying something heavy draped in a white towel. He put it carefully on the center of the table. Then he paused, made sure I was looking, before gravely he removed the cloth. It was a stone head, whether of a man or a woman it was difficult to say. The nose had been broken short. The hair was done in a fillet, with two side pieces. But the power of the fragment was in the face. It was set in a triumphant smile, a smile that would have been smug if it had not been so full of the purest metaphysical good humor. The eyes were faintly Oriental, long and as I saw, for Conchis had put a hand over the mouth, also smiling. The mouth was beautifully modeled, timelessly intelligent and timelessly amused.

"That is the truth. Not the hammer and the sickle. Not the stars and stripes. Not the cross. Not the sun. Not gold. Not *yin* and *yang*. But the smile" (p. 142).

In the smile Fowles transmits a sort of aesthetic élan, a zeal for life and play secure for those who can

develop a mental and spiritual Eden. Those who share in the smile are "the elect," and they are chosen to form an elite coterie: "It was above all the smile of dramatic irony, of those who have privileged information. I looked up at Conchis's face; and knew I was right" (p. 143).

The smile is for those who know the primacy of the artistic experience. The smile is bathed in irony and humour; it recognizes the inevitability of the joke and the necessity of the game, for such are the indispensable qualities of the Edenic consciousness: "Suddenly the humor, the absurd, tender, touching incongruity of the whole thing, made me smile. I realized that it must be some elaborate joke of Conchis's, mounted for my exclusive benefit.

There was no need to rush about trying to discover how it was done" (p. 129). For Fowles, with his bag of clever literary tricks, with his riddles, the pursuit of the smile involves games and gamesmanship, and of such stuff is art created. Lily, as performer, acts in a manner toward Nicholas quite similar to that adopted by Fowles and Nabokov toward the reader: "She had a way of looking slightly obliquely at me, as if she knew something I did not -- not anything to do with the role she was playing, but about life in general; as if she too had been taking lessons from the stone head" (p. 164). Art, in its ironic, oblique pattern, revels in the glory of words and images, and attains meaning as the process of revealing the elemental smile, the only Eden in which the postlapsarian

world may share. In the context of the godlike smile, the words of Hegel lend clarification:

The ideal work of art confronts us like a blessed god. For the blessed gods [Of Greek art], that is to say, there is no final seriousness in distress, in anger, in the interests involved in finite spheres and aims, and this positive withdrawal into themselves, along with the negation of everything particular, gives them the characteristic of serenity and tranquillity. In this sense Schiller's phrase holds good: 'Life is serious, art cheerful.' Often enough, it is true, pedants have poked fun at this, on the ground that art in general, and especially Schiller's own poetry, is of a most serious kind; and after all in fact ideal art does not lack seriousness -- but even in the seriousness cheerfulness or serenity remains its inherent and essential character. This force of individuality, this triumph of concrete freedom concentrated in itself, is what we recognize ... And this results not at all from a mere satisfaction gained without struggle, but on the contrary, only when a deeper breach has rent the subject's inner life and his whole existence. For even if the heroes of tragedy for example, are so portrayed that they succumb to fate, still the heart of the hero recoils into simple unity with itself, when it says: 'It is so.' The subject in this case still always remains true to himself; he surrenders what he has been robbed of, yet the ends he pursues are not just taken from him; he renounces them and thereby does not lose *himself*. Man, the slave of destiny, may lose his life, but not his freedom. It is this self-reliance which even in grief enables him to preserve and manifest the cheerfulness and serenity of tranquillity.⁷

In the Leonardo smile we find the key to Fowles's aesthetic, as well as a stylistic device of central unification. The omnipresent smile pursues us throughout the work, and in it Fowles places the task of unifying the

⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), Volume I, pp. 157-8.

various tales and fables. Alison, a New World figure of primal, instinctual innocence, is bathed in the smile from the very beginning, and the progress of the novel may be seen as Nicholas' increasing awareness of the importance of her endowment. Alison, Lily, Rose are variations on the virgin-temptress figure of Eve; they seek to expose Nicholas to the pleasures of an internalized, self-created world, an Eden of the mind. Lily de Seitas performs the same function. The masque, art, is an elaborate process of initiation into the Edenic consciousness, as are the many tales Conchis unravels under the benign sky of Bourani. The story of Conchis's mythical childhood has obvious meaning beyond the facilitated introduction of Lily and Rose, and later, their mother. Through it Conchis describes a paradisaic world where art, nature, and play are indulged with the freest rein possible. It is this memory of Eden which Conchis seeks to convey to his pupil.

Figures as diverse as de Deukans and Nygaard are joined in their parallel pursuits of the Adamic experience. For de Deukans, collector and aesthete, limited though he was by the compulsion to possess, the path to Eden was a directly aesthetic one made secure by paintings and music. For Nygaard, primordial Adam, naked and alone, the stars and the cosmos, no less than God, provided the essence of an innocent, prelapsarian world. For Conchis, the masque is Eden; it allows him to connect

past, present, and future, to play forever, and to live eternally, through others and by means of his creations. The masque, the game, and the quest form the splendid godgame of art, which provides the full gratification of creator and audience.

Even the wars and the German Occupation of Phraxos, dark and destructive plagues of the postlapsarian world, counterpoise Eden only to provide moments of ultimate freedom, those moments when the wild primal cry of *eleutheria* rings out. The significance of the smile, the only ultimate significance, Conchis relates, asserts itself even in the finality of death. As the force of art and beauty, it alone survives. The smile is the lost world of Eden preserved. Nicholas, rational, Apollonian man, the doubter, challenges the smile, and this is Conchis's reply: "Because a star explodes and a thousand worlds like ours die, we know this world is. That is the smile: that what might not be, is" (p. 142). The process of the masque simulates, by means of artifice and invention, those various paths to the smile which Conchis had already narrated, but which Nicholas, rational and artless, must experience to understand.

A significant scene of initiation into these mysteries is the trip Nicholas and Alison take to Mount Parnassus, an event given impetus by Conchis and stimulated by the Bourani experience. It is not in the masque but of it, and it is an act undertaken by Nicholas only with the

greatest reluctance. He is not won easily by the smile. Alison leads the way into nature. She is free in a way Nicholas is not. Totally without pretension or pose, she picks flowers and plays with the children. Her spontaneous joy greets everyone; only Nicholas will not partake of it. Her smile annoys him, as do the smiling faces of the peasant children. He wants to go back into the car to escape the encounter, but the Edenic power of the landscape overwhelms him nonetheless. He begins to know the essence of the experience when he realizes that "what we were doing began to loom like the precipitous blue shadow of Parnassus itself, over what we were" (p. 240). The prose attains a high lyricism; Fowles renders an unspoilt world, nature before the Fall. The journey toward Parnassus takes Nicholas into a fresh world, different from the world of Bourani in that it is totally natural and unconfined. Here there are no barbed wire fences nor threatening guards, just the essential world of man, woman, and nature. Nicholas begins to have an inkling of what it means to be magus:

"We wound up the high hills and glens and had a picnic lunch in a meadow dense with clover and broom and wild bees. Afterwards we passed the crossroads where Oedipus is reputed to have killed his father. We stopped and stood among the sere thistles by a dry stone wall; an anonymous upland place, exorcized by solitude. All the way in the car up to Arachova, prompted by Alison, I talked about my own father, and perhaps for the first time in my life without bitterness or blame; rather in the way Conchis talked about *his* life" (pp. 240-1).

As the actual ascent to Parnassus begins, the Edenic vision is inescapable. The imagery of Eden preponderates: "The path mounted ... through clearings alive with butterflies" (p. 243). A lone mule and his master greet the couple on their way. One solitary hut offers refuge. Despite the difficulty of the long climb, Alison moves effortlessly. Nicholas has a harder time, but even he is dominated by the relentless spirit of the quest. Wild and infinite, Parnassus becomes a garden of perceptual delights. An Edenic landscape extends for miles, in all directions that man can see. The imagery is as lush as the scene described, and the scene is as luxuriant as any known in the Golden Age. I shall quote a long passage which, as much as it describes nature, delineates as well the vibrancy of the artistic imagination and the exuberance of the world it creates. Poetry claims nature; the smile is complete; Fowles's aesthetic of the verbal Eden is clear:

Before us lay a wide basin of green turf, ringed with peaks and festooned by streaks of snow still clinging to the scree and hollows of the steeper slopes. Everywhere there were flowers -- harebells, gentians, deep magenta-red alpine geraniums, intense yellow asters, saxifrage. They burst out of every cranny in the rocks. They enameled every stretch of turf. It was like stepping back a season. Alison ran on ahead, wildly, and turned, grinning, her arms held out, like a bird about to take wing; then ran on again, dark blue and jeans blue, in absurd childish swoops.

... we came on beds of violets in bloom, huge purple flowers that had a delicate

scent; and then at last, hand in hand, we struggled up the last few yards and stood on the little platform with its crowning cairn. Alison said, "Oh my God, oh my God."

On the far side a huge chasm plunged down two thousand feet of shadowy air. The westering sun was still just above the horizon, but the clouds had vanished ... We seemed to stand immeasurably high, where land and substance drew up to a narrow zenith, remote from all towns, all society, all drought and defect. Purged.

... it came to me like a shock ... that the reality of the place was as beautiful, as calm, as ideal, as so many poets had always dreamed it to be.

... There came back the memory of that mind-voyage Conchis had induced in me under hypnosis. They seemed almost parallel experiences; except that this had all the beauty of its immediacy, its uninducedness, its being-nowness (pp. 244-5).

On Mount Parnassus, a place traditionally sacred to the Muses, Nicholas gains his first real artistic insight. Spontaneously, he knows beauty. It reaffirms life, heightens one's awareness; but fundamentally, it exists in and for itself. In this context Fowles's aesthetic becomes clear; aestheticism stands for itself. Art is its own ultimate experience, yet this aesthetic experience does not limit one to an isolated and effete perspective; rather, Fowles suggests an ever-expanding perspicacity and a cyclic return to the primordial myth -- the renewal of Eden. These Parnassian implications postulate the central concern of the novel. If Fowles is guilty of none of the aesthetic dandyism which marked

the English Parnassian movement of Pater and Wilde and their followers, his aesthetic perception is similar to that of late nineteenth-century *L'art pour l'art*. Fowles joins the revolt against meaning, and for this he could not have created a better foil than the character of Nicholas, with his compulsive drive for interpretation and answers. The magus leads Nicholas away from the search for meaning; he is urged to stop worrying about the ultimate reality and to enjoy the mystery. The unrestrained play of the word, the masque, and the game offers its own rewards.

The Edenic consciousness is not the glorification of form against the merit of substance. It is not ignoring the water for the wave, as Nicholas would like to suggest when he decries "this characteristically twentieth-century retreat from content into form, from meaning into appearance, from ethics into aesthetics, from *aqua* into *unda*" (p. 364). It is for Fowles a drinking of the water without ignoring the pleasure of the wave, without separating them and classifying, since as Hegel demonstrates, form and content describe an organic whole and are inseparable. Fowles treats the novel as a masque in which full ^{sensuous} participation prepares the path to an understanding of the aesthetic involved. To enjoy the fineness of the word and the beauty of the created world, is to play in the Eden of the mind; this is the closest man comes to the meaning

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of art. In fact, such is the only meaning of art which the postlapsarian world allows. Alone, the Edenic memory of art survives. The act Nicholas performs for Alison upon learning of her putative death offers an analogy to the function of the novel, and it echoes the lament of Humbert Humbert upon learning of the death of Lolita: "I did not pray for her, because prayer has no efficacy; I did not not cry for her, because only extroverts cry twice; I sat in the silence of that night, that infinite hostility to man, to permanence, to love, remembering her, remembering her" (p. 400).

Conchis rejects the tradition-bound novel of the nineteenth century: "The novel is no longer an art form". He burnt "every novel I possessed. Dickens. Cervantes. Dostoievsky. Flaubert. All the great and the small. I even burnt something I wrote myself when I was too young to know better" (p. 92). The traditional narrative is not valid in our time, but Conchis the magus cannot stop from making fictions; the masque at Bourani is his fiction and his life. The polysemantic world of the smile determines the ludic novel. For Fowles, as for Nabokov, to "look at the harlequins" is the art of the contemporary novel. Nicholas' capacity as the new magus derives from his ability to participate in the rites of Bourani and to pursue the new Eden as a state of mind. The direct Edenic import of the Parnassian episode becomes more

obvious as Chapter Forty-Two carries the imagery already quoted from Chapter Forty even further. Arcadia transforms, if only ephemerally, a conventional modern couple into the new Adam and Eve. Nicholas is learning to "drink of the water," to taste the truth of a new consciousness:

She stopped. We both noticed it at the same time. Below us to our right, the sound of water, a lot of water.

"I'd love to bathe my feet. Could we get down?"

... At one end was a waterfall some ten feet or so high. A pool of limpid water had formed beneath it. The clearing was dense with flowers and butterflies, a tiny trough of gold-green luxuriance after the dark forest we had been walking through. At the upper edge of the clearing there was a little cliff with a shallow cave, outside which some shepherd had pleached an arbor of fir branches. There were sheep droppings on the floor, but they were old. No one could have been there since summer began.

"Let's have a swim."

"It'll be like ice."

"Yah."

She pulled her shirt over her head, and unhooked her bra, grinning at me in the flecked shadow of the arbor; I was cornered again.

"The place is probably alive with snakes."

"Like Eden."

... she wore a smile of touching innocence. She did not know it, but it was at first for me an intensely literary moment. I could place it exactly: *England's Helicon*. I had forgotten that there are metaphors and metaphors, and that the greatest lyrics are very rarely

anything but direct and unmetaphysical. Suddenly she was like such a poem and I felt a passionate wave of desire for her. It was not only lust, not only because she looked, as she did in her periodic fashion, disturbingly pretty ... but because I was seeing through all the ugly, the unpoetic accretions of modern life to the naked real self of her -- a vision of her as naked in that way as she was in body; Eve glimpsed again through ten thousand generations (pp. 254-5).

The essence of Nicholas' experience in the literary and metaphorical Arcadia is learning the process of the new Eden and attaining a mental synthesis of it. The episode at Parnassus must continue at Bourani and in England as well. It is something to be retained and to grow into a central consciousness. Such is the mystery Conchis presents for Nicholas and which Fowles's aesthetic conveys to the larger audience. Nicholas, however, still feels the initial hesitancy which he can abandon only towards the last pages of the novel, and then with ambiguity. He, much like the modern reader, wants more control over the fictional Eden-game: "Yet in the end this unflawed natural world became intimidating. I seemed to have no place in it, I could not use it and I was not made for it" (p. 52). In order to convert Nicholas, the Garden of Eden must be transferred to his mind. Eden becomes art, and this is epitomized exactly in the conception of the "theatre in the garden". After the war, Conchis planned and executed a theatre in the garden of Bourani where the masque was performed.

Clearly, the process of the masque is established as a remembrance, homage, and continuation of the prelapsarian world. It is this theatrical, aesthetic Eden which seduces Nicholas, the reluctant new Adam.

Fowles arranges his novel theatrically, in three parts, as in a drama; the artifice is conscious and parallels the method of Conchis with his theatre-in-the-garden. Eden merges in art, where its world of play and games continues unscathed by the disturbance and ravages of the tenebrous postlapsarian universe. The conscious artifice, the studied aestheticism, occurs to Nicholas early in the book. Conchis presents his story with "an air of stage management", "as a dramatist tells an anecdote where the play requires" (p. 106). The characters are referred to as players, and late in the novel Nicholas even uncovers an elaborate series of stage directions. Fowles unmistakably throws out these motifs as a suggestion of his own conception of the new novel. The author places his fiction in the revolutionary mould of contemporary art obviously and cogently when he has Conchis discuss the theory of drama. Conchis presents his theory to Nicholas who as the new magus will eventually carry it forward:

He smiled almost benignly at me ... then went on. "Before the war we used to amuse ourselves with my private theatre here. And during the war, when I had a great deal of time to think, and no friends to amuse me, no theatre, I conceived a new kind of drama. One in which the conventional relations between audience and actors were

forgotten. In which the conventional scenic geography, the notions of proscenium, stage, auditorium, were completely discarded. In which the continuity of performance, either in time or place, was ignored. And in which the action, the narrative, was fluid, with only a point of departure and a fixed point of conclusion." His mesmeric eyes pinned mine. "You will find that Artaud and Pirandello and Brecht were all thinking, in their different ways, along similar lines. But they had neither the money nor the will -- and perhaps not the time -- to think as far as I did. The element that they could never bring themselves to discard was the audience." He spread his arms. "Here we are all actors. None of us are as we really are" (p. 366).

A similar rite of renewal is what Fowles proposes for the novel in discarding the nineteenth-century tradition of the well-formed work with its obligatory conventions and techniques, the straight plot line, the omniscient narrator, the ubiquitous moral message. Fowles posits the invalidity and emptiness of such codification and rigidity for the novel of today. In a way similar to what Conchis suggests, the ludic novel created by Fowles depends crucially on the involvement of the reader in the various games, word plays, tricks, and manoeuvres that form the aesthetic. Without the participation of the reader, a participation demanding much more than the passive reading of words and a suspended disbelief, this theory of fiction does not work. The reader is active, and his countermove on the chessboard of the fictive encounter is essential. Moreover, in a lighter fashion, if the author did not

offer us the pick of his bag of tricks, the work would not be as engaging as we find it. Part of the message is clearly to lose oneself in the "funhouse" of the fiction, as John Barth suggests in his short story.

Inasmuch as Fowles indulges the mythic character of the Edenic consciousness, his characters become proportionally one-dimensional, as was noted above. It is a director's game. Part of this problem works cleverly to the author's advantage, for the protagonist is one who views all women as but variations on the theme of his own sexual gratification. Hence, until the last chapters of the novel demonstrate the protagonist's compassion for Kemp and Jojo, it is quite conceivable that Nicholas as narrator makes little differentiation between the various women he knows. But even with this in mind, it is hard to read the novel and feel anything but the cardboard flimsiness of Alison, Lily, and Rose. Indeed, they are stock characters. Alison is a New World provincial, rather coarse but lively and enthusiastic and full of love and/or masochism. Lily and Rose are as identical as their twin status suggests. They are upper-class, attractive, well-mannered. Each woman is blonde-haired, sexy, intelligent, and male-manipulated. Nicholas relates to each "girl" in a basically lustful manner; each is the same to him ultimately; only the façades differ.

Fowles offers no independent characterizations of these central figures; the reader views them as one-dimensionally as does Nicholas. If symbolic meaning rests in our perception of Alison as the new Eve, we have also to see Lily and Rose in this light as well. The readers' perception is conceived along the same lines as Nicholas'. All the women resemble Botticelli's Primavera, graceful and innocent, even the original Lily Montgomery and Lily de Seitas. Nicholas' comment on the Eve-like consistency of the women he knows conveys the substance of this weakness, as well as the power of its mythic continuity for the re-creation of the verbal Eden: "I thought of other baths shared: Alison. Of how all naked women become the same naked woman, the eternal naked woman; who could not die, who could only be celebrated as I was going, in an obscure way, to celebrate Alison in Julie; almost to mourn her as I remet and remade her" (p. 433-4). The danger of Nicholas' solipsism and the author's banal self-indulgence becomes apparent. Safely to solipsize characters is to destroy their life and palpability for the pleasure of the panorama and in the interest of the chess move. The fiction may pursue its quarry into the ground.

The central character does not escape the creator's weak hand. The establishment of Nicholas as the new magus rests with his potential for the Adamic experience, for creating his own internalized Eden. Fowles resurrects

the sterility of the exploitative young man and gives him centre stage. The portrayal of Nicholas as the new creator would be more cogent if the protagonist were not an obvious puppet of Fowles no less than of Conchis. On the other hand, the reader's doubt of Nicholas' capacity for the masque and the growth it entails provides much of the suspense and tension of the novel. It is part of Fowles's game of unpredictability. Lack of definition of the protagonist leaves the avenues of stratagem open and it generates mystery and enticement. Such lack of depth in characterization is a calculated loss, a chess sacrifice, if you will, but a loss nonetheless. The scope of the novel extends into the mythic and aesthetic; since the artist-magus is thoroughly and obviously in control, characters become a secondary consideration. They exist to be manipulated and for the humour of the manipulation. The gratification and the perpetuation of the smile are essential.

With the reduction of characters to symbolic values, relationships become tableaux. Thus it is understandable that Nicholas acts similarly with the different women. We have already remarked that Nicholas' behaviour with Alison and Lily is confined to sexual and emotional seduction. This dynamic becomes clarified if we remember that the quest for sensual gratification plays a large part in the Edenic consciousness, as was demonstrated in Chapter Four about *Ada*. The prelapsarian

world glorified erotic pursuits and the free rein of the senses. On Bourani this process continues. Perhaps the most unconventional portrayals in the book are those "polymorphous perverse" couplings which Conchis orchestrates. Love and sex take prime importance. Sexual imagery is plentiful. Eden is an untainted sexual playground, and Priapus reigns in the garden.

At first, Nicholas is ignorant of the identity and meaning of the statue in the garden. With his promiscuous past and his pursuit of sex as an avenue of assertive triumph, Nicholas has a completely non-Edenic understanding of Eros. For him, sex involves not love but performance, and the sort of grossly insensitive exploitation which Eden countervails. Hence Priapus offers a significant initiation. As Nicholas tells Conchis about Alison for the first time, Eros confronts him in the garden:

... once again I felt no real sympathy coming from him; simply his obsessive and inexplicable curiosity. I told him I had recently written a letter.

"And if she doesn't answer?"

I shrugged. "She doesn't."

"You think of her, you want to see her -- you must write again." I smiled then, briefly, at his energy. "You are leaving it to hazard. We no more have to leave everything to hazard than we have to drown in the sea." He shook my shoulder. "Swim!"

"It's not swimming. It's knowing in which direction to swim."

"Towards the girl. She sees through you, you say, she understands you. That is good."

I was silent. A primrose and black butterfly, a swallowtail, hovered over the bougainvillea around the Priapus arbor, found no honey, and glided away through the trees. I scuffed the gravel. "I suppose I don't know what love is, really. If it isn't all sex. And I don't even really care a damn any more, anyway."

"My dear young man, you are a disaster. So defeated. So pessimistic" (p. 141).

On the following page, Conchis introduces Nicholas to the Edenic mystery of the smile, which is to form the basis for his sensual exploration. If he knows little else, Nicholas is aware of the need this will eventually fulfill: "I needed a new land, a new race, a new language; and, although I couldn't have put it into words then, I needed a new mystery" (p. 15).

The new land of Eden which awaits Nicholas promises sensual gratification, and such is the prime motivation, by means of the allurements of Lily, which draws him further and further into the mystery's vortex. Indeed, one reason why Nicholas journeys to Greece in the first place is that he wants to drop Alison in favour of new sexual adventures which "Circe-like" Greece may offer. In a beautifully undercut passage, Fowles demonstrates the ego-centricity and banality of Nicholas' initial quest. One goal of the masque is to destroy Nicholas' platitudinous sexual framework which this passage voices: "I could not spend my life crossing such a

Sahara; and the more I felt it the more I felt also that the smug, petrified school was a toy model of the entire country and that to quit the one and not the other would be ridiculous. There was also a girl I was tired of" (p. 14). With a Nabokovian trenchant brilliance, the final sentence reduces Nicholas' quest to the level of a new sexual adventure. Such ironic undercutting continues in the figure of Lily-Julie, who personifies the solipsism of Nicholas' puerile sexuality. The masque of Bourani seeks to inculcate in him its Edenic antithesis. The eros which Conchis proposes is diametrically opposed to the shallow, callous operations of Nicholas. Nicholas is a narcissistic figure whose only pursuit is the reaffirmation of the self in others. Thus the ironic reversal of each self-gratified moment with Lily-Julie is superlatively effective in showing postlapsarian man only and always making love to himself.

Lily acts as the protector of Alison, for she helps to create in Nicholas an Edenic consciousness which he is meant to share with Alison. Lily is described in terms of the smile leitmotif, and she seeks to imbue Nicholas with the mystery and meaning of the smile. Despite the scope and intensity of her efforts, Nicholas is a slow learner. His hubris is such that he cannot believe Lily is not wholly in love with him; he continues with the game to

determine and to secure her love. The idea of the game for its own sake has not yet engaged him: "In so many ways, it seemed all no more than a game. Lily gave strongly the impression that she was playing with me -- amusing herself as much as acting a role at Conchis's command. But all games, even the most literal, between a man and a woman are implicitly sexual ... I wanted to be seduced, to drink the wave" (p. 198). Nicholas drifts for a long time; his new awareness approaches hesitantly. Lily is the chief impetus and gradually Nicholas absorbs the force of the play itself, the joy and the dalliance of a new mental perspective. These early perceptions become expanded: "I had a sensation that I couldn't define; except that it was new" (p. 97). "After all, it was a masque, and I wanted, or after a very short while began to want, to play my part" (p. 165).

Through Lily, this Artemis figure of Arcadia, Nicholas finds the outlines of Eden. Their meetings occur in wonderful natural settings, in lilac groves and under pine boughs. Nicholas enters the realm he knew at Parnassus with Alison, and he commits himself to probe the centre of the smile. Sensual gratification leads to new meanings and is associated always with the mystery of the masque and the structure of artful play:

I went back to the gate and ran down the path to Moutsá. There I stripped off my clothes and plunged into the sea and

rubbed my face in the salt water, then swam a hundred yards out. The sea was alive with phosphorescent diatoms that swirled in long trails from my hands and feet. I dived and seal-turned on my back and looked up through the water at the blurred white specks of the stars. The sea cooled, calmed, silked round my genitals. I felt safe out there, and sane, and out of their reach, all their reaches. (p. 300)

As I swam out there, with the dark slope of Bourani across the quiet water to the east, I could feel in me a complex and compound excitement, in which Lily was the strongest but not the only element. I thought, I *am* Theseus in the maze: let it all come, even the black minotaur, so long as it comes; so long as I may reach the center. (p. 301)

Nicholas agrees to partake of the game. He puts himself into the hands of the magus, whose "so potent art," like Prospero's in *The Tempest*, asserts its power. Conchis, like Prospero, creates his own magical island, and "his art is of such power" that Nicholas must obey. The art of Conchis's created world takes over Nicholas' life. He is ineluctably drawn inside the game. Art is conceived as the creation of a new consciousness which leaves Nicholas spellbound. The spiritual, and at times quasi-magical, influence of the new world brought forward by the masque is a controlling metaphor. Conchis is variously characterized as "a conjurer" (p. 76), a healer (through his training as a physician), a *sorcier*, a dramatist, and "a sort of novelist *sans* novel, creating with people, not words ... as a genius among practical jokers" (p. 229). The latter may also describe how the novelist sees himself. The novel is

conceived as play, play which recalls the smile of Eden and secures once again the joy of that world, challenging history as it engenders its own past and postulates its unique future. In the face of modern absurdity, of the age of nuclear obliteration, the ambiguity of history, all man can do is what Conchis urges the protagonist to do as the masque ends:

"'Learn to smile, Nicholaš. Learn to smile'" (p. 479).

Ludic art hails the fiction of reality and the reality of fiction. As Kermode asserts about Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*: "We can, indeed, no longer assume that we have the capacity to make value-free statements about history, or suppose that there is some special dispensation whereby the signs that constitute an historical text have reference to events in the world".⁸

The way to the smile is through the labyrinth of the game, and the *modus operandi* is, as Kermode indicates, a subjective aspect of consciousness. Nicholas sees himself as Theseus caught in the maze; so, too, the author projects the audience into the perplexity of his artifice. Fowles employs the dominant imagery of the chess game and of the child's fun at hide-and-seek. Both motifs are further linked with images of Eden, such as the garden and nature. In one scene, Lily

⁸ Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 108.

calls herself "Astarte, mother of mystery," an Eve-like figure of the primal woman. Nicholas is surprised to hear that she was in the garden when he told Conchis about Alison. His reply points out the dynamic at play: "I'll bet you're good at chess" (pp. 202-3). Nicholas describes his interaction with Conchis in terms of game strategy: "He did not smile, but inclined his head. We said nothing more. I had the distinct feeling that he was a chess master caught between two moves; immensely rapid calculation of combinations. Once he even turned to say something, but changed his mind" (p. 213). The essential quality of play asserts itself again through the hide-and-seek metaphor, which is similar to Nabokov's use of this motif in *Ada*. Conchis explains the method of the Bourani masque, and the importance of the seeker:

I was beginning to lose my sense of total sureness that he was inventing a new explanation of the masque. So I smiled again.

"And me?"

"Do children in England still play that game ..." he put his hand over his eyes, at a loss for the word ... *cache-cache*?"

"Hide-and-seek? Yes, of course."

"Some hide?" He looked at me to guess the rest.

"And I seek?"

"The hidiers must have a seeker. That is the game" (pp. 215-6).

I had the now familiar feeling that came in conversations at Bourani; of ambiguity; of not knowing quite what statements applied to -- in this case, whether to the assumption that Lily was really a schizophrenic or to the assumption that of course I knew that her "schizophrenia" was simply a new hiding place in the masque.

... I became the dupe again (p. 216).

... I hadn't played chess for years; but I remembered that the better you got, the more it became a game of false sacrifices (p. 217).

In an obviously parallel fashion, the game is the method by which the author controls and toys with the reader. As in the novels of Nabokov, in the fiction of Fowles irony is strong and pervasive. Art becomes "a sort of game inside a game inside a game" (p. 267), just like the masque at Bourani. The reader participates in the guesswork and ambiguity; he is actively involved in the created world of play. The sustaining power of art retrieves the smile of life. The nature of the aesthetic realm is that writer and audience enter a voyage back to the entertainment and liberality of a recaptured Eden, an Eden which lives in the mind.

Nicholas plays the game himself, perpetuating the smile. He tells the next subject, John Briggs, nothing which will prevent his role as the new Adam in the masque. Instead, all he puts forward to guide Briggs is the power of the smile: "I gave him a long smile; I wanted him to remember it was a smile that had gone on too long and hadn't quite fitted in with the

situation" (p. 571). In such a way Nicholas asserts his capacity as artificer, as a new magus, becoming a conjurer himself, reaffirming that conjuring potential which previously he could only put to selfish use in seducing women (p. 17). With the positive aspirations of Icarus the artificer, to whom Nicholas compares himself early in the work (p. 91), he may guide himself to a new Eden without being scorched by the sun. As the godgame ends and the masks fall down, art is synthesized with life. Nicholas rejoins Alison; the game has achieved the smile. Alison is transformed into Eve and she wears the Leonardo smile imbued with the grace of Botticelli's Venus: "... she was slowly smiling. That archaic smile, her variant of theirs, steadier, braver, far less implacable, without malice or arrogance, yet still that smile" (p. 604). Through the labyrinth of games and play, man realizes the essential freedom of art as it releases in him the capacity to be fully human.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Borges and the Paradise of the Tale:

Fiction as the Immortal Dynasty

The Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges occupies a unique place among contemporary literary figures and most particularly among the group of writers producing what this study postulates as ludic fiction. His status outside Latin America as an author of eminence is a relatively recent one, especially for a writer who published his first book in 1923. Little notice was taken of Borges until the 1950's, when the first Spanish interpretations and criticisms of his work began to appear. It was not until the early 1960's that the English-speaking world recognized the value of Borges's short stories, essays, and poems. As the writer himself has noted, the world was slow to acclaim the worth of his created universe:

Fame, like my blindness, had been coming gradually to me. I had never expected it, I had never sought it. Néstor Ibarra and Roger Caillois, who in the early 1950's daringly translated me into French, were my first benefactors. I suspect that their pioneer work paved the way for my sharing with Samuel Beckett the Formentor Prize in 1961, for until I appeared in French I was practically invisible -- not only abroad but at home in Buenos Aires. As a consequence of that prize, my books mushroomed overnight throughout the western world.¹

¹ Jorge Luis Borges, "An Autobiographical Essay," in *The Aleph and Other Stories 1933-1969*, ed. and trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni (New York: Dutton, 1970), p. 254.

What strikes the contemporary reader is the amazing quality of fictional innovation and freshness inherent in stories written well over thirty years ago, stories predating *Lolita*, for example, by over a decade. These are stories which ring powerfully coeval and exciting in comparison with fiction published in the 1960's and '70's. Borges writes tales which explore an idealistic Eden of art replete with the tricks and games of verbal play which many critics identify with the age of Barth and Pynchon in the United States, not with the world between the wars in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Since Borges was creating ludic fiction long before some of its contemporary exponents had yet put pen to paper, and because, as Tony Tanner points out, his influence on the literature of today is an important and a pervasive one,² it is appropriate for this study to examine Borges's work and the precedents it establishes. It is impossible to discuss traditional literary devices such as character and plot with reference to Borges.³ It is futile to dilate on social issues which the stories

2 Tony Tanner, *City of Words: A Study of American Fiction in the Mid-Twentieth Century* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971), p. 39.

3 In his use of Isidro Parodi and numerous other characters, we are reminded of what has been called "a comic-strip concept of character, frequently involving nomenclature which gives rise inevitably to caricature and parody." See Robert S. Ryf, "Character and Imagination in the Experimental Novel," *Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 20, Number 3 (Autumn 1974), p. 319.

might project. Such projections, when they exist, are rather turned inward toward a verbal structure of irony and parody than they are thrust outward toward a realistic comprehension of the external world. There are myths and fables in Borges which strangely detail patterns of human behaviour and individual action, but the myths exist less as Jungian archetypes for the way men interact and form society than as brief treatises about the way men create the world and digest experience. Thus the stories are much closer to epistemology than to a didactic orthodoxy. The intense mythic quality of "The Aleph," for example, is more a vehicle for the idealistic ethos of the self-refracting literary imagination than it is a parable for a lost and forbidding actuality. The key to Borges is not the symbols he creates but rather the symbols which he destroys in the labyrinthine tricks of the verbal game, for to create a symbol *qua* symbol is to lose transcendence before it. To be Borges is to affirm again and again the dominance of the mind over any created images.

To posit a superiority of mind over reality and matter is to formulate a belief in the creative energy of man and to corroborate the vast potential of man to create the world in which he lives. The ideal realm is absorbed in Borges by the Edenic. Such an artistic drive propels man into the role of a new Adam

whose consciousness contains the Edenic Aleph, the paradisiac vision of all things made palpable. Borges's fiction is a paean to the infinite variability of man's finite constructions; it is a realization of the Edenic wonder produced by a finite being caught in time and space and trapped by decay and death. As the author himself confirms, "The other tendency is to presuppose (and to verify) that the number of fables or metaphors of which men's imagination is capable is limited, but that these few inventions can be all things for all men, like the Apostle."⁴ With this statement, Borges raises men to the level of gods as he postulates an infinitely renewable creative potential. As the Aleph is the beginning and the end, so also is the imagined universe of fiction at once the means and the goal. The paradise of the tale confirms man's slouching towards Bethlehem in the ephemeral glory of the verbal garden.

The Edenic quest of fiction delineates a central preoccupation of Borges's idealist point of view. This issue is clarified by the propensity of the writer to explore the methods of language and thought. Words and language define the reality examined by the artist, and for him the transcendent fact is then that the

⁴ Jorge Luis Borges, *Other Inquisitions*, 1937-1952, trans. Ruth L.C. Simms (London: Souvenir Press, 1973), p. 189. Future references to this edition will carry the abbreviation *OI*, and will appear in parentheses.

tools of language become merged with this reality. No less than for Nabokov, the fiction of Borges is largely the story of his love affair with language and with books. The approach to the garden comes through the library. One of Borges's earliest memories is that of a child looking from the room of books into a sun-bathed garden: "What is certain is that I was brought up in a garden, behind lanceolated iron railings, and in a library of unlimited English books."⁵ For this writer the universe of words is not a separate reality or a secret escape; it is the central, stable, and most secure fact of life, of being a man in the world. The preponderant power of the mind and of art cannot be overestimated. The central adjunct of Borges's life is the written word and the echoing thought. As Borges himself has acknowledged, "If I were asked to name the chief event in my life, I should say my father's library. In fact, I sometimes think I have never strayed outside that library."⁶ What is particularly Edenic about the artistic imagination of Borges is his ability in fiction to recapture the bright world of childhood with its

⁵ Quoted by John Sturrock in *Paper Tigers: The Ideal Fictions of Jorge Luis Borges* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 17.

⁶ Borges, "An Autobiographical Essay," in *The Aleph and Other Stories 1933-1969*, p. 209. Future references will indicate this collection of short stories by the abbreviation A, and will be noted in parentheses.

infinite promise and delight, for his magical fantasies, whether they be horrendous, gay, bleak, mysterious, or frightening, all equally attest to the primal capacity of man to create a world through the play with words.

It is important to establish the connection of the garden with literature for Borges, and further significant that this conjunction comes through the perceived freedom of childhood. As a child one knows an inherent sense of wonder and magic, a belief in fantasy and in the limitless possibilities for creating one's own universe. Childhood is the aleph in the life of man in the same way that fiction is the focus of all points in the created world of aesthetic reflection. Barrenechea has noted that the town of Adrogué, where Borges spent much of his childhood, continues, like the garden, to be an image of fictional fulfillment and freedom: "Adrogué appears from time to time in his poems, essays, or stories with a magic which restores the lost days of scenting honeysuckle or eucalyptus, or is useful in contaminating with unreality some of the stories which are populated with statues, useless fountains, rhombic glass doors in yellow, red, and green; it is the unreality of childhood remembrances which memory shifts and fantasy elaborates."⁷

⁷ Ana Maria Barrenechea, *Borges the Labyrinth Maker*, ed. and trans. Robert Lima (New York: New York University Press, 1965), pp. 3-4.

For Borges, the book and the garden are identical. Fiction becomes a paradise and art is the fruit of Eden. Borges initially thought this fruit prohibitive. Not until his illness with its threatening possibility of intellectual loss did he feel bold enough or satisfactorily motivated to write fiction. For Borges to write fiction is to enter "the paradise of the tale," the primal garden of delight. Fiction was literally a salvation from the perils of destruction. It was a strong and necessary reaffirmation of the Adamic talent of creating an autonomous entity beyond the individual and his temporal limitations. We have Borges's own account of this experience:

I know that the least perishable part of my literary production is the narrative, yet for many years I did not dare to write stories. I thought that the paradise of the tale was forbidden to me. One day, I suffered an accident. I was in a sanitarium where I was operated upon. I did not know whether I had left that era, a time I cannot recall without horror, a period of fever, insomnia, and extreme insecurity. I did not know whether I still maintained intact my intellectual integrity, and so I resolved to perform an experiment. If after the operation and the extremely long convalescence I tried to write a poem or any essay and failed, I would know that I had lost that intellectual integrity. Thus, I decided upon another approach. I said to myself: "I am going to write a story and if I cannot do so it does not matter because I have not written one before. In any case, it will be a first attempt". Then, I began to write a story -- "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quijote*" -- which turned out rather well; this was followed by others, such as "The Writing of the God," and I discovered that I had not lost my intellectual integrity

and that I could now write stories. I have written many since.⁸

Thus did the freedom and vitality of an Eden regained present themselves to Borges. The stories subsequent to "Pierre Menard" verify the author's faith in "the paradise of the tale" and demonstrate the cogency of his Adamic vision, of an unwavering belief in the ultimacy of language and the narrative pattern. Art, especially fiction, holds the secret of "the unimaginable universe." Like the Aleph, which "is one of the points in space that contains all other points," literature transcends the feeble vision of finite experience and encompasses the whole world through an artistic eternity. The glimpse of eternity comes by way of the aesthetic achievement fleetingly attained by the mortal individual. Even Carlos Argentino Daneri, minor ungifted poet that he is, connects the supreme vision of "the unimaginable universe" with the art of poetry. He sees the Aleph as "the world itself," as "the only place on earth where all places are -- seen from every angle, each standing clear, without any confusion or blending." He continues, "I kept the discovery to myself and went back every chance I got. As a child, I did not foresee that this privilege was granted me so that later I could write the poem" (A pp. 28, 23).

8 Quoted by Barrenechea, p. 152.

The character Borges disputes the Aleph of Daneri, because for Borges "the unimaginable universe" can only be attained through the Adamic perfection of his love for the dear Beatriz, a Beatriz not unlike the Beatrice of Dante's poetic inspiration or Petrarch's Laura, Poe's Annabel, or Nabokov's Lolita. The Eden of art is a recapitulation in the poetic garden of a perfect, immortal love. It is at the altar of invention that Borges lays the Edenic love quest. He quotes the remark made to him by a disappointed journalist looking for a "real" Aleph in the streets of Buenos Aires, that "the entire thing is your own invention." Borges the artificer expresses the freedom of creation as the triumph of the Whitmanesque Adam in "the setting down of a limited catalog of things" (A p. 264).

Art for Borges becomes the constant renewal of the dream of the garden through the structures of literary creations embodied not only in the short story but also in poetry and essays. The book possesses the fullness of a universal dream paradise possessed of a transcendent, palpable reality. As Irby has commented "the world is a book and the book is a world, and both are labyrinthine and enclose enigmas designed to be understood and participated in by man."⁹ In "The Library of Babel,"

⁹ James E. Irby, "Introduction," in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings* by Jorge Luis Borges, ed. Yates and Irby (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1970), p. 19. Future references to this edition will appear in parentheses with the abbreviation L.

Borges himself has asserted, "It does not seem unlikely to me that there is a total book on some shelf of the universe" (L, p. 84). The entrance to the garden is the opening of a book, made real by the palpability of the metaphors employed. And as the author speculates, "It may be that universal history is the history of a handful of metaphors" (L, p. 224). This quest for the realm "beyond the here and now" is how Borges has described his early efforts at poetry. It is well illustrated by one of his early verses:

The garden's grillwork gate
 opens with the ease of a page
 in a much thumbed book,
 and, once inside, our eyes
 have no need to dwell on objects
 already fixed and exact in memory.
 Here habits and minds and the private language
 all families invent
 are everyday things to me.
 What necessity is there to speak
 or pretend to be someone else?
 The whole house knows me,
 they're aware of my worries and weakness.
 This is the best that can happen --
 what Heaven perhaps will grant us:
 not to be wondered at or required to succeed
 but simply to be let in
 as part of an undeniable Reality,
 like stones of the road, like trees (A, p. 226).

The freedom of nothing being alien to oneself, of "simply being let in," describes the power of words to articulate the "undeniable Reality" of a mental universe. Borges returns again and again to the book, the library, the mind, because such embody for him the intimacy and eternity of primal life, of the original garden existence enjoyed by the symbolic first family of man. The mental

journey of fiction is the search and attainment of such a restored Eden. Borges's essay "The Flower of Coleridge" skilfully elucidates this point. Here the flower is taken as a metaphor of fictional invention, as being both method and goal. The article goes on to describe James's unfinished novel, *The Sense of the Past*, as an Edenic narrative in which the hero returns to the particular day of the eighteenth century when a painting he admires was put on canvas. "In *The Sense of the Past*," Borges tells us, "the nexus between the real and the imaginative (between present and past) is not a flower ... but a picture." The power of mind is the essential resource of man to create his particular Eden. The author of "The Aleph" delights in this story, significantly, because "the cause follows the effect, the reason for the journey is one of the consequences of the journey" (L, p. 12). The dynamic Eden of art creates and sustains the aesthetic pursuit even as it arises from it.

One is reminded of the anfractuositities of Borges's tales by the complexity of this Jamesian narrative. For instance, in "The Garden of Forking Paths," Dr. Yu Tsun imagines "a future as irrevocable as the past" (L, p. 47). He thinks of an idealist universe where the future determines the past as much as the past is coloured by the present, for the underlying assumption is that it is all in the mind of the observer or agent of a particular mortal destiny, that is, in the mental

conceptualization of the individual. One learns of the infinite labyrinthine book of Ts'ui Pên, which Yu Tsun misperceives as "an indeterminate heap of contradictory drafts," incomprehensible to him because "in the third chapter the hero dies, in the fourth he is alive" (L, p. 50). Unable to imagine a past dictated by its future, Yu Tsun cannot grasp the idealist perfection of his ancestor's infinite book. Such is the quintessential issue in Borges. This is stated, with an ostensibly effortless fineness, in "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*," in which the twentieth-century mind sees a startling new *Quixote* and creates through the same words a new reality. Literature is conceived as the re-creation of a universal spirit, as the exchange of new forms for old in Edenic progression and renewal.

This idea reminds one of that notion of Valéry's quoted by Borges in "The Flower of Coleridge." The reader learns that "around 1938 Paul Valéry wrote that the history of literature should not be the history of the authors ..., but rather the history of the Spirit as the producer or consumer of literature." The Hegelian echo of this idealistic Eden is clear: man re-forms life and literature by the dictates of his mental striving toward an Adamic equilibrium. Borges is taken with this idea, with the flowering of art as a final goal. He quotes Coleridge on the floral

garden metaphor and then adds his own exegesis:

"If a man could pass through Paradise in a dream, and have a flower presented to him as a pledge that his soul had really been there, and if he found that flower in his hand when he awoke -- Ay! -- and what then?"

I wonder what my reader thinks of that imagining. To me it is perfect. It seems quite impossible to use it as the basis of other inventions, for it has the integrity and the unity of a *terminus ad quem*, a final goal. And of course it is just that; in the sphere of literature as in others, every act is the culmination of an infinite series of causes and the cause of an infinite series of effects. Behind Coleridge's idea is the general and ancient idea of the generations of lovers who begged for a flower as a token (OI, pp. 10-11).

Continuing this discussion in a commentary on Wells's *The Time Machine*, Borges introduces the following thought about an idealist Eden, that "the gods ... will discover that the same chess pieces they were playing with before are lying on the grass of a new meadow" (OI, p. 11). This artistic garden of mind is perhaps explored best in "The Garden of Forking Paths," which unites the motifs of games and play with a literary Eden. Like many of Borges's stories, this one is a fantastical *mélange* of mental structures, chimerical imaginings, and the hard, suspenseful data of detective fiction. Borges himself, clearly, would like his story to admit of all possibilities, of an infinite progression and regression. Nevertheless, what is obvious is the supreme fiction of the tale, its conspiring to erect a complex pattern attaining

meaning solely within the mind of man. The garden, which is a labyrinth of infinite possibilities and perpetual turnings, finds expression in the ultimate lexical artifice, in the baffling novel of Ts'ui Pên, a fiction designed to be uniquely determined by the mind of each reader.

Just as the book follows the complex architecture of a formal labyrinth, so also do the final free hours of the protagonist Dr. Yu Tsun. The mystery of his escape and ultimate detection by Richard Madden focuses the external construct of the plot in a seemingly coherent, straightforward fashion. Yet the unlikely, ponderous coincidences are such that any assumption of uncomplicated, readily perceptible narration must be abandoned by the reader forthwith. In spite of the complexity and oneiric aura of the story, it begins with indisputable factual information. Borges is fond of commencing his narratives in this manner. A historical source, Liddell Hart's *History of World War I*, is cited to provide the truth of historical reference. The inherent irony is that it matters not at all whether this device of "the true story" has any corroboration in the annals of recorded history. For the author, it is a game, a toying with the sympathy and belief of his audience.

Borges's use of this device ironically counterpoises against itself the inadequacy of a single reality to

describe or explain human experience, in the same way that the perpetual patternings of art, like the labyrinth and the mirror, defy any ultimate transcription. The only adequate reflection of external events is their perception by the consciousness of the individual, in the mental flowering of infinite possibility. This, for Borges, is the basic reality and the central freedom of the human experience. As Tanner has commented about the fictional universe of Borges, "It is another example of freedom from accepted reality pictures ... In this fantastic land it would seem that the potency of mind over matter is everywhere evident -- perception variously subsumed under imagination and dreams seem, like Nabokov's artistic electricity, to sustain the world."¹⁰

Borges adumbrates the freedom of consciousness as the chief mental tool in the ideational garden. The metaphor of the garden sustains itself throughout "The Garden of Forking Paths" as the central motif employed to sanction the untouchable realm of mind. Indeed, Dr. Yu Tsun disputes the initial awareness of his imminent capture and impending death by the thought of his origin as a child in the primordial garden: "In spite of my dead father, in spite of having been a child in a symmetrical garden of Hai Feng,

¹⁰ Tanner, *City of Words*, p. 44.

was I -- now -- going to die?" (L, p. 45) Yu Tsun is a man of limited imagination; originally he could not comprehend the meaning of his ancestor's labyrinthine book. Stephen Albert must point it out to him, must explain the significance of a mental continuity erected outside time. Yet even Yu Tsun possesses an instinctive awareness of the importance of the garden, of its hopeful potential symbolically to defeat the ravages of mortal man and especially his own mortality. He realizes the fundamental urgency of the phrase "to imagine," even if his application is restricted to a specific category of experience. *"The author of an atrocious undertaking,"* he tells us, *"ought to imagine that he has already accomplished it, ought to impose upon himself a future as irrevocable as the past"* (L, p. 47).

The main distinction between Yu Tsun and his ancestor, the great novelist Ts'ui Pên, is that the latter imagines not one "irrevocable future" but rather a multifarious category of "various futures" (L, p. 50). Thus the protagonist lacks the full vision of the artistic garden. This is the lesson revealed to him by Stephen Albert before Yu Tsun commits his own "atrocious undertaking" of murder. The reader, then, views Yu Tsun rather in the same light in which Borges described his friend Macedonio in "An Autobiographical Essay": "I look back on him now, however, as an Adam bewildered by the Garden of Eden"

(A, p. 230). For in *The Garden of Forking Paths*, Yu Tsun finds confusion rather than the transcendent elucidation of the Edenic consciousness. He is unmindful of the basic cogency and relevance of his perceptions as he instinctively, fugaciously, encounters the garden:

The instructions to turn always to the left reminded me that such was the common procedure for discovering the central point of certain labyrinths. I have some understanding of labyrinths: not for nothing am I the great grandson of that Ts'ui Pên who was governor of Yunnan and who renounced worldly power in order to write a novel that might be even more populous than the *Hung Lu Meng* and to construct a labyrinth in which all men would become lost. Thirteen years he dedicated to these heterogeneous tasks, but the hand of a stranger murdered him -- and his novel was incoherent and no one found the labyrinth. Beneath English trees I meditated on that lost maze: I imagined it inviolate and perfect at the secret crest of a mountain; I imagined it erased by rice fields or beneath the water; I imagined it infinite, no longer composed of octagonal kiosks and returning paths, but of rivers and provinces and kingdoms ... I thought of a labyrinth of labyrinths, of one sinuous spreading labyrinth that would encompass the past and the future and in some way involve the stars. Absorbed in these illusory images, I forgot my destiny of one pursued (L, pp. 47-8).

Totally involved with the consciousness of a created "labyrinth of labyrinths," Yu Tsun evades the trammels of reality, if only for one transcendent moment. He feels like a new Adam in the garden, a free man. This sense of freedom in the fiction of Borges symbolizes a central dynamic of art. It manifests the ability of the artifice to withstand the erosion of reality, to elude the defeat of time and space, to assert a

unique infinity of mind. Momentarily, Yu Tsun compels infinity, the infinity of fiction, to play for him, to release him from entrapment. The endless possibility of art to lead man to this sense of mental perpetuity is thus the driving force of Ts'ui Pên's novel and likewise an instrumental guide to Borges's own theory of fiction, for Borges's aim is "one sinuous labyrinth that would encompass the past and the future and in some way involve the stars." As Wheelock has argued: "To dispense with the accepted verities and create fictions out of other fictions is to think freely in the most radical sense. It is to start from, and return to, the primordial home ground of myth in forming and re-forming one's ideas of the world."¹¹

Yu Tsun is confused in that he cannot accept his illusory vision of the labyrinth as a reality, as part of a free consciousness. For him the "illusion" is delightful and compelling, but tinged with the ultimacy of delusion. But the paradox is, again, that despite his reservations and scepticism, the labyrinth carries him further along, toward the infinity of the garden, toward the free aesthetic form perceived as the pure bliss of music articulated by Schopenhauer. As Borges has stressed in his essay "Avatars of the Tortoise":

¹¹ Carter Wheelock, *The Mythmaker: A Study of Motif and Symbol in the Short Stories of Jorge Luis Borges* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), p. 68.

"Art -- always -- requires visible unrealities" (L, p. 242). This asseveration finds confirmation in the experience of Yu Tsun, who is momentarily transformed by the visible unreality of the garden:

I felt myself to be, for an unknown period of time, an abstract perceiver of the world. The vague, living countryside, the moon, the remains of the day worked on me, as well as the slope of the road which eliminated any possibility of weariness. The afternoon was intimate, infinite. The road descended and forked among the now confused meadows. A high-pitched, almost syllabic music approached and receded in the shifting of the wind, dimmed by leaves and distance. I thought that a man can be an enemy of other men, of the moments of other men, but not of a country: not of fireflies, words, gardens, streams of water, sunsets. Thus I arrived before a tall, rusty gate. Between the iron bars I made out a poplar grove and a pavilion. I understood suddenly two things, the first trivial, the second almost unbelievable: the music came from the pavilion, and the music was Chinese. For precisely that reason I had openly accepted it without paying it any heed. I do not remember whether there was a bell or whether I knocked with my hand. The sparkling of the music continued (L, p. 48).

Upon reaching the house, Yu Tsun is greeted by Stephen Albert, whose first question bears directly on the fiction's central issue: "You no doubt wish to see the garden?" (L, p. 49) The garden motif becomes omnipresent. The particular context of the story offers an elucidation for the noticeable dominance of this image, an elucidation which brilliantly demonstrates the Adamic quest of the fiction. Yu Tsun is on the run. He is being pursued by the relentless drive of his enemy, Captain Richard Madden. What the protagonist

seeks is salvation from time, a respite from the impending doom of his entrapment and capture. He searches feverishly, desperately, for a possible route of escape, for an extenuation of his ineluctable fate. Yu Tsun plunges into the English countryside to elude the confinement of the city and to assert an autonomy which he knows will be short-lived. He finds what he seeks, which is precisely that freedom of the garden offered to him by Albert and delineated originally by the art of his great-grandfather, Ts'ui Pên, in his novel *The Garden of Forking Paths*. For Borges, as for the Chinese novelist of his story, to be lost in the labyrinthine garden of art is to regain a primal freedom of consciousness and to know the Adamic wonder of "various futures."

By the power of the literary creation, man returns to the primal, mythical freedom of the garden, just as for Yu Tsun the experience is a return to the freedom of his own protective childhood. The path to the library containing the fiction of Ts'ui Pên reminds the hero of his own childhood Eden, which is linked to the wonder of the books in his family's library. The careful reader cannot but be impressed with the parallel of this spiritual adventure of the protagonist and that of Borges's own experience as a child in the family library. In both recollections, the freedom, beauty, and Edenic expansion of mind are clear. It is in Stephen Albert's library that Yu Tsun remembers the

richness of the imagined paradise of childhood:

The damp path zigzagged like those of my childhood. We came to a library of Eastern and Western books. I recognized bound in yellow silk several volumes of the Lost Encyclopaedia, edited by the Third Emperor of the Luminous Dynasty but never printed. The record on the phonograph revolved next to a bronze phoenix. I also recall a *famille rose* vase and another, many centuries older, of that shade of blue which our craftsmen copied from the potters of Persia ... (L, p. 49)

The treasures of this library and the astonishing presence of a lost garden signify for Yu Tsun the elemental if ephemeral renewal of his Adamic quest. Art is, like the flower of Coleridge, "a final goal," and "the culmination of an infinite series of causes" (OI, p. 11). To recognize a primal past is to become a new Adam and to admit the possibility of "innumerable futures" (L, p. 53). To posit an artistic Eden is to acknowledge an infinite spirit and mind; it is to see "the absolute space that had been a liberation for Bruno," and to perceive "that an Aristotle was merely the wreckage of Adam, and Athens, the rudiments of Paradise" (OI, p. 8). To locate an Eden in words and in art is to extend oneself toward infinity, toward a truly Adamic expansion of consciousness. And as Cassirer has shown, "In Bruno's doctrine infinity no longer means a mere negation or limitation. On the contrary, it means the immeasurable and inexhaustible abundance of reality and the unrestricted power of the human intellect." He continues that:

It is in this sense that Bruno understands and interprets the Copernican doctrine. This doctrine, according to Bruno, was the first and decisive step toward man's self-liberation. Man no longer lives in the world as a prisoner enclosed within the narrow walls of a finite physical universe. He can traverse the air and break through all the imaginary boundaries of the celestial spheres which have been erected by a false metaphysics and cosmology. The infinite universe sets no limits to human reason; on the contrary, it is the great incentive of human reason. The human intellect becomes aware of its own infinity through measuring its powers by the infinite universe.¹²

The retreat from the world by the illustrious Ts'ui Pên was a journey out of time toward infinity. It is worth noting that Ts'ui Pên was "learned in astronomy, in astrology and in the tireless interpretation of the canonical books, chess player, famous poet and calligrapher," and that "he abandoned all this in order to compose a book and a maze" (L, p. 49). The game motif is significant for this story and for the larger realm of Borges's fiction as it articulates one of the special constituents of the artistic Eden; that is, as it heralds the role of free play in the garden. A prerogative of art is the sense of endless play in the primal paradise which it alone is able to forge within the realm of the postlapsarian adult consciousness. Borges is a serious artist and a central part of his

¹² Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), p. 15.

intense seriousness is his quest for free play, which may be defined for our context in the words of Kant as "purposiveness without a purpose." Many of Borges's central characters share the author's capacity for riddles, tricks, games and play. Borges, like Nabokov and Barth, is preeminently a gamesman.

Wheelock notes, "It has been said and resaid that to Borges literature is only a game that men play; not as the Dadaists played it, with desperate frivolity, but somewhat as Mallarmé saw it: 'a solemn, regulated, and significant game.'"¹³ Yu Tsun and his ancestor Ts'ui Pên are gamesmen too, players in the labyrinth of art, in the puzzle of *The Garden of Forking Paths*. Moreover, both "The Garden of Forking Paths," short story, and the Chinese novel of the same name involve the mystery of a game and the anticipation of a solution. The infinite realm of human consciousness is asserted by the aesthetic act as man steps outside time, as did Ts'ui Pên, and as he renounces the finite world for the garden of play and the games of the artistic Eden. It is Stephen Albert who discovers that *The Garden of Forking Paths* and the novel are synonymous. He thus re-creates the Edenic garden as he solves the puzzle of the labyrinth and the book:

13 Wheelock, *The Mythmaker*, p. 12.

'Here is Ts'ui Pên's labyrinth,' he [Albert] said, indicating a tall lacquered desk.

'An ivory labyrinth!' I [Yu Tsun] exclaimed. 'A minimum labyrinth.'

'A labyrinth of symbols,' he corrected. 'An invisible labyrinth of time. To me, a barbarous Englishman, has been entrusted the revelation of this diaphanous mystery. After more than a hundred years, the details are irretrievable; but it is not hard to conjecture what happened. Ts'ui Pên must have said once: *I am withdrawing to write a book. And another time: I am withdrawing to construct a labyrinth.* Every one imagined two works; to no one did it occur that the book and the maze were one and the same thing. The Pavilion of Limpid Solitude stood in the centre of a garden that was perhaps intricate; that circumstance could have suggested to the heirs a physical labyrinth. Ts'ui Pên died; no one in the vast territories that were his came upon the labyrinth; the confusion of the novel suggests to me that *it* was the maze. Two circumstances gave me the correct solution of the problem. One: the curious legend that Ts'ui Pên had planned to create a labyrinth which would be strictly infinite. The other: a fragment of a letter I discovered.'

Albert rose He faced me and in his hands he held a sheet of paper that had once been crimson, but was now pink and tenuous and cross-sectioned I read, uncomprehendingly and with fervour, these words written with a minute brush by a man of my blood: *I leave to the various futures (not to all) my garden of forking paths ...* (L, p. 50).

The infinity inherent in "the garden of forking paths" is articulated by Albert as the limitless possibility of the literary creation, what Borges has called the "infinite world of literature" (01, p. 13). The fictional Eden of words rests like the dream of a primordial past. It is the portrayal of

the only chance of modern man to attempt "a new refutation of time." Albert explains to Yu Tsun that "*The Garden of Forking Paths* is an enormous riddle, or parable, whose theme is time," and that in his solving of the riddle he has re-established "'the primordial organization'" (I, p. 53). He is talking directly about the unravelling of the chaos of the manuscript, but the statement applies equally to the function of art as it uncovers a lost Eden. Borges himself has affirmed, "In the course of a life dedicated to literature and, occasionally, to metaphysical perplexity, I have perceived or sensed a refutation of time, which I myself disbelieve, but which comes to visit me at night and in the weary dawns with the illusory force of an axiom. That refutation is in all my books ... " (OI, p. 172). He perceives each work of literature to be an attempt at the infinite, in the same terms that Albert discusses this potential of imagination in the book of Ts'ui Pên. Borges, the fictionalist, the fabricator of labyrinths, continues that "the real moment of ecstasy and the possible insinuation of eternity which that night so generously bestowed on me will be crystallized in the avowed irresolution of these pages" (OI, p. 180). Each work of literature represents another challenge to the prison of time.

The problem of time is said to have obsessed the

creator of the labyrinth and the book. The solution devised by Ts'ui Pên to escape or transcend the limits of temporal reality crucially involves the Adamic structure of art as a vehicle to evade time. To recapture a lost Eden is to assert the power of a past still present and continually available; it is to deny time, to annul its erosion. As the mind reclaims an infinite past it is thereby capable also of uniting consciousness with the creation of an infinite future, with the Emersonian expansion of universal possibility. To make time nugatory through the immortality of art establishes a freedom reminiscent of paradise. As the artist and the reader take on the role of Adam they predicate the infinite richness of creation.

Borges has pondered that "the first instant of time coincides with the instant of the Creation, as St. Augustine says; that first instant tolerates not only an infinite future, but an infinite past Adam appears and his teeth and his skeleton are those of a man of thirty-three; Adam appears (writes Edmund Gosse) and he has a navel . . ." (OI, p. 24). Time extends infinitely, back and beyond. The metaphor of the Adamic myth in literature is predicated on the value of a mythical past to be reasserted in the present and to reiterate itself in the future. The creation of literature comes to us, then, as an elemental postulate about the continuum of perpetual

time, that is, about the flow of human consciousness toward infinity, toward freedom. This is what the character Albert clarifies as the secret answer to the labyrinthine garden of fiction:

'Before unearthing this letter, I had questioned myself about the ways in which a book can be infinite. I could think of nothing other than a cyclic volume, a circular one. A book whose last page was identical with the first, a book which had the possibility of continuing indefinitely In the midst of this perplexity, I received from Oxford the manuscript you have examined. I lingered, naturally, on the sentence: *I leave to the various futures (not to all) my garden of forking paths.* Almost instantly, I understood: "the garden of forking paths" was the chaotic novel; the phrase "the various futures (not to all)" suggested to me the forking in time, not in space. A broad rereading of the work confirmed the theory. In all fictional works, each time a man is confronted with several alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others; in the fiction of Ts'ui Pên, he chooses -- simultaneously -- all of them. *He creates*, in this way, diverse futures, diverse times which themselves also proliferate and fork. Here, then, is the explanation of the novel's contradictions ...' (I, p. 50-1)

The words "*he creates*" are emphasized. This emphasis on man's creative ability is a pervasive element in Borges's fiction, and one of great importance. The motif of creation joins with the garden metaphor to elucidate the role of man as a new Adam, an agent who fabricates himself and the world through the process of thought and the vehicle of art, for this new Eden is primarily an idealist realm. Freedom thus becomes an adjunct of the mind of man, just as the discovery of "*hrönir*" in "*Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*" signifies

a "promised freedom" (L, p. 38) for the inmates of the state prison. Whether Yu Tsun's experience in "The Garden of Forking Paths" is part of a dream, of a "tenuous nightmare" (L, p. 54) or whether it is a "real" journey to the village of Ashgrove does not matter. The chimera of a fiction depicts a state of mind which for the protagonist is the only possibility. As in "The Secret Miracle," where Hladik imagines himself spared from the firing squad, and lives an extra year in his mind, producing his artistic masterpiece, the prime reality by which men live in Borges's fiction is a self-referential epistemology.

As the reader observes in the story of Tlön, the far-reaching perceptions of imagination are the very tools which create the world. The play of man in the game of fiction is far removed from the trivial; it is rather a life-sustaining attribute. Such is the experience of Yu Tsun and of Jaromir Hladik. The artifices of fiction, magic, the dream, and the game ensure a temporary yet vital glimpse at the paradise of the mind, for to imagine a new or alternate reality, man must become his own creator. Rodriguez-Monegal alludes to this notion in his analysis of Borges's poem "Adam Cast Forth." He tells us, "Borges slips in the hypothesis that perhaps Adam has also dreamed his God; perhaps the Garden 'was nothing but a magic

fantasy/of the God I dreamed.'"¹⁴ Both the dream and the game of fiction guarantee man an essential freedom over his own fate. The power to think and to create retains the essence of the liberation of the garden. As Hegel has explained, "For thinking means that, in the other, one meets with one's self. It means a liberation, which is not the flight of abstraction, but consists in that which is actual having itself not as something else, but as its own being and creation ..."¹⁵

The infinity of fiction, its intrinsic ability to create endless permutations and patterns, articulates the fundamental freedom of fictional play, in which nothing is alien to man because it is all part of his creation. The book is not to be perceived as a means of evading the responsibilities of the external world; it is discerned as an independent, self-defining goal. In his essay "On the Cult of Books," Borges adumbrates the "marvelous consequences" leading "to the concept of the book as an end in itself." He goes on to say that, "According to Mallarmé, the world exists for a book; according to Bloy, we are the versicles or words or letters of a magic book, and that incessant book is

¹⁴ Emir Rodriguez-Monegal, "Symbols in Borges' Work," *Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 19, No. 3 (Autumn 1973), p. 331.

¹⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Logic, Being Part One of the Encyclopaedia of The Philosophical Sciences* (1830), trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 222.

the only thing in the world: or rather, it is the world" (OI, pp. 118, 120). This is how one comes to understand the meaning of the idealist realm of Tlön. The narrator tells us "that the men of this planet conceive the universe as a series of mental processes ..." (L, p. 33). Such is another way of saying that men have become their own gods, the artificers of an entire world. The mind generates a pattern which becomes infinite:

The literature of this hemisphere (like Meinong's subsistent world) abounds in ideal objects, which are convoked and dissolved in a moment, according to poetic needs. At times they are determined by mere simultaneity. There are objects composed of two terms, one of visual and another of auditory character: the colour of the rising sun and the far-away cry of a bird. There are objects of many terms: the sun and the water on a swimmer's chest, the vague tremulous rose colour we see with our eyes closed, the sensation of being carried along by a river and also by sleep. These second-degree objects can be combined with others; through the use of certain abbreviations, the process is practically infinite. There are famous poems made up of one enormous word. This word forms a *poetic object* created by the author. The fact that no one believes in the reality of nouns paradoxically causes their number to be unending. The languages of Tlön's northern hemisphere contain all the nouns of the Indo-European languages -- and many others as well (L, p. 33).

The people of Tlön play with words in much the same way that the author plays with the variations and endless possibilities of language. Describing the grammar of Tlön, Borges advances not only the ludic realm of the universe of Uqbar, but furthermore, he

articulates the fundamental premises of the games he himself indulges in. Borges, like Nabokov, has created a fictional world through a conscious and deliberate playing with words. As a man standing between two mirrors which face each other can see his image go on forever, so also the artist poised between the two idealist realms of mind and book probes an endless potential for expression. The mirror is an often-repeated image in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," and may be understood as a metaphor for the fertility of the idealist realm. The art of fiction is a mirror of the patterns of mind given form through words. The narrator ascertains this metaphor when he states, "I owe the discovery of Uqbar to the conjunction of a mirror and an encyclopedia" (L, p. 27). Mirrors are prohibited in the idealist land of Uqbar since they multiply the visible universe; this is heresy because it is a denial of the planet's *raison d'être* as an adjunct of mind. But for Borges the ironic idealist, mirrors perfectly detail the infinite illusion of the aesthetic Eden of art, and present this milieu as an endless source of play.

The "reality" of Tlön is that it does not exist in material or spacial terms, but rather as a product of consciousness in the minds of its creators. Yet there is an intractable, coersive quality about Tlön and we feel the oppressiveness of the aesthetic idealism it

affirms. The narrator is critical. He avers, "We discovered ... that mirrors have something monstrous about them" (L, p. 27). The prohibitions in *Tlön* assert an inflexible, uncreative dogmatism. The mirror motif itself confers this. Gass has demonstrated that "We must remember that mirrors reflect us quite indifferently: they accept anything, and if these characters [in Borges as well as in Nabokov] are followed by puddles, polished steel, and shadowing walls, the characters themselves are mirrors. They contain images, they do not see. Two pure mirrors, facing one another, draw a blank."¹⁶ The mirror image can also be seen as one of profound sterility, for mirrors in themselves are empty; they offer nothing and absorb nothing.

Emptiness and oppressiveness confront the reader as larger, more troubling features of the literary universe of Borges. There is no room for growth or development in his stories. The challenges offered are perhaps those of the trivial, short-lived game. Certainly they do not spring from the fully human encounter. Borges's ludic realm involves mirrors, coins, labyrinths, mysterious symbols, and fantastic realms. Inanimate objects control much of the author's attention. Men and women rarely come across as vital human beings, and social contexts are exchanged for mythic symbols. Rodriguez Monegal argues

¹⁶ William H. Gass, *Fiction and the Figures of Life* (Boston: Nonpareil Books, 1971), p. 115.

that although Borges conceived "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" during the totalitarian political prologue to World War Two, the meaning of the story turns ultimately inward. He notes that Borges "concentrates on the adventure of the discovery of texts about Utopia."¹⁷ Although the author makes explicit reference to the totalitarian qualities apparent in Orbis Tertius (his metaphor for earth), he does not suggest any commitment to action. As Steiner remarks, "The space of action in which a Borges figure moves is mythical but never social. Where a setting of locale or historical circumstance intrudes, it does so in free-floating bits, exactly as in a dream. Hence the weird, cool emptiness which breathes from many Borges texts as from a sudden window on the night."¹⁸

Borges acknowledges the entrapment of the idealistic framework of Tlön. The narrator clearly delineates its monstrous quality, the element of force and dehumanization of the prescribed gamesmanship. He points out the "inhuman laws" and admits, "Tlön is surely a labyrinth destined to be deciphered by men." He continues, describing Tlön's debilitating influence: "The contact and the habit of Tlön have disintegrated this world."

17 Emir Rodriguez Monegal, *Jorge Luis Borges: A Literary Biography* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978), p. 334.

18 Steiner, *Extraterritorial*, p. 41.

Enchanted by its rigour, humanity forgets over and over again that it is a rigour of chess masters, not of angels." (L, p. 42). However, after the delivery of this statement and the plenary awareness it confers, the narrator still retreats or returns to the remote refuge of art. The fate of the world is ineluctable from this writer's perspective. His response mimicks that of *Candide*; he will cultivate his own garden. His solace will be aesthetic play: "The world will be Tlön. I pay no attention to all this and go on revising, in the still days at the Adrogué hotel, an uncertain Quevedian translation (which I do not intend to publish) of Browne's *Urn Burial*" (L, p. 43). The lack of publication or distribution of the scholarship reinforces the quality of nonutilitarian aesthetic play and it also emphasizes the inherent solipsism and self-reflection such a pursuit entails. Monegal offers a cogent summary:

The search for an article in an encyclopedia has ended with the discovery that the world is being taken over by the encyclopedia. The limits between fiction and reality have been erased. In reaction, the narrator resigns himself to a remote corner of a remote country, devoting himself entirely to a useless occupation: the translation of a book, written by an English baroque writer, about funeral inscriptions. By relentless artifice, Borges has created in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" more than a mirror to reality: he has created a mirror to the writing of fiction as well. The story finally reflects only itself.¹⁹

19 Monegal, *op.cit.*, pp. 337-38.

Borges's art seeks to unite itself with the imagination of each reader through the games of the magus. The universe of Tlön and of Borges's fiction assumes a controlling power of mind, so that all time and space -- past, present, and future -- become just so many arbitrary designations in the individual consciousness. The Edenic possibilities of this idealist art may be perceived through the metaphor of "*hrönir*" in Tlön. The narrator explains that "the methodical fabrication of *hrönir* ... has performed prodigious services ... It has made possible the interrogation and even the modification of the past, which is now no less plastic and docile than the future" (L, p. 38). Like the inhabitants of Uqbar, the writer of fiction also possesses the infinite malleability of time and space. He, too, creates the universe in which he and his audience live. Borges sounds fairly ebullient when he avers that "the fact is that every writer *creates* his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future" (L, p. 236). The art of fiction synthesizes idealism with freedom in the creation of a verbal Eden by which to view the world, perhaps, indeed, to change it. For the idealist, a change in consciousness is tantamount to a change in the external world.

The corollaries between Borges and the philosophy of idealism are numerous and consequential. Idealism

postulates a world view with which Borges has expressed admiration, and toward which he has demonstrated a propinquity of thought, although he removes himself from close alignment by a wall of irony and by games of paradoxical reversal. This attitude shares much with the paradoxical reversal of the following statement, made by the narrator of "The Immortal": "We accept reality easily, perhaps because we intuit that nothing is real" (L, p. 143). The mental sphere transforms reality into a comprehensible structure; the noetic pursuit registers and records meaning. As men in the world we are like Hladik, hero of "The Secret Miracle": "He had no document but his memory." The verbal Eden performs a "secret miracle" for man. In its infinite extension, the art of fiction overcomes death in a manner comparable to that of the mind of Hladik: "The physical universe came to a halt." And as it does so, the hero reaches this point of illumination: "He had asked God for a whole year to finish his work; His omnipotence had granted it. God had worked a secret miracle for him; German lead would kill him at the set hour, but in his mind a year would go by between the order and its execution" (L, p. 124). Art releases man from temporality to a natural world of freedom.

The Edenic myth of fiction may be taken as part of the particular theory of fiction which Borges embraces, as an important element of his *ars poetica*. Inherent

in the stories and essays are clear and penetrating analyses of what fiction is about and how its processes operate. The stories are often explicit commentaries on the circular journey of art. Josipovici has noted about Proust what is equally true for Borges: "... the labyrinth along which he has travelled is in effect his own body, since he is not an object in the world but the limits of his world. But it is also the book he has written, for the travelling did not come first and the writing after; rather, the writing was the travelling." Josipovici continues:

Having made his work, the author is now both the book and outside the book. Outside not in any space-occupying place, ... but outside by virtue of the fact that he *made* the book. And the reader too can stand out there, with him, because, experiencing the limits of his own world, he too is momentarily freed of his imprisonment within it. But let us be clear as to what is involved. It is only so long as the book is being read, so long, that is, as the human imagination is travelling along the arteries of the labyrinth, that we are aware of the boundaries, and therefore of what lies beyond them ... Closed, the book becomes an object among many in the room. Open, and read, it draws the reader into tracing the contours of his own labyrinth and allows him to experience himself not as an object in the world but as the limits of his world. And, mysteriously, to recognise this is to be freed of these limits and to experience a joy as great as that which floods through us when, looking at long last, with Dante, into the eyes of God, we sense the entire universe bound up into one volume and understand what it is to be a man.²⁰

20 Gabriel Josipovici, *The World and the Book: A Study of Modern Fiction*, Second Edition (London: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 308-309.

In "For Bernard Shaw," Borges tells us that "a book is the dialogue with the reader, and the peculiar accent he gives to its voice, and the changing and durable images it leaves in his memory. That dialogue is infinite." Such is the dialectic of the verbal paradise; it is eternally read anew in man's image and likeness. Borges adds that "One literature differs from another, either before or after it, not so much because of the text as for the manner in which it is read" (OI, pp. 63-4). It is in this sense that we may apply the metaphor of "Pierre Menard." Literature is Edenic because it allows the reader, as it did originally the artist, the freedom to probe a new world. Hegel realized this transcendence of thought when he wrote that by its exercise "the mind is then in its own home-element and therefore free; for freedom means that the other thing with which you deal is a second self -- so that you never leave your own ground but give the law to yourself."²¹ Such freedom is at the core of the dialectical pattern of fiction. As in *Tlön*, in the aesthetic theory of Borges, readers are free to "invent authors" and to re-create fictions reflected in the mirrors of their own minds, for "a book which does not contain its counterbook is considered incomplete" (L, p. 37). The "dialectical game" is a concerted free

21 Hegel, *Logic*, p. 39.

world, a garden of play achieved by author and audience. The fantastical games of fiction share common ground with the idealist artificers of Tlön, as the following passage indicates:

This monism or complete idealism invalidates all science. If we explain (or judge) a fact, we connect it with another; such linking, in Tlön, is a later state of the subject which cannot affect or illuminate the previous state. Every mental state is irreducible: the mere fact of naming it -- i.e., of classifying it -- implies a falsification. From which it can be deduced that there are no sciences on Tlön, not even reasoning. The paradoxical truth is that they do exist, and in almost uncountable number The fact that every philosophy is by definition a dialectical game, a *Philosophie des Als Ob*, has caused them to multiply. There is an abundance of incredible systems of pleasing design or sensational type. The metaphysicians of Tlön do not seek for the truth or even for verisimilitude, but rather for the astounding. They judge that metaphysics is a branch of fantastic literature (L, p. 34).

The particular dialectical games of Borges's carefully crafted inventions postulate an Eden of mind where man plays with the fantastical structures of fiction. The aesthetic process is timeless, in this sense being like "one of the schools of Tlön [that] goes so far as to negate time: it reasons that the present is indefinite, that the future has no reality other than as a present hope, that the past has no reality other than as a present memory" (L, p. 34). For Borges, this means abandoning oneself to the eurhythmy of form, to the challenge of ludic structures:

.... We could generalize, and infer that *all* forms possess virtue in themselves and not in a conjectural "content". That would support the theory of Benedetto Croce; in 1877 Pater had already stated that all the arts aspire to resemble music, which is pure form. Music, states of happiness, mythology, faces molded by time, certain twilights and certain places -- all these are trying to tell us something, or have told us something we should not have missed, or are about to tell us something; that imminence of a revelation that is not yet produced is, perhaps, the aesthetic reality ("The Wall and the Books," '01, p. 5).

The aesthetic reality of Borges involves games, labyrinths, mirrors, false turnings, duplications, and tricks of distortion and perception. The reader is asked to participate not only in the construction of a fiction; he is also drawn into an agonistic dialogue with the author and asked, metaphorically, to take his turn at the game board, and at the same time, warned to be careful of the delusions of this anamorphic art. "Death and the Compass," with its aura of a scholarly detective story, is a good example of the gaming between characters and between Borges and his readers. It is interesting to note that Borges has maintained an avidity for crime drama, that, as he says in his "Autobiographical Essay," he has written several detective novels and stories in collaboration with Adolfo Bioy-Casares. In one of these they originated the figure of Isidro Parodi, a detective bathed in the full irony of being confined to a gaol cell. The games with Parodi illustrate another instance of

idealist emphasis, albeit parodic, with the mind of the character asserting a freedom denied his body isolated behind bars. The game secures the artistic garden of play in its constant, ineluctable attention to the transcendent ability of consciousness to fabricate its unique realm, and to do so indefinitely. As Navarro has noted:

Borges' persona is a totally playful character. He never takes anyone or anything "seriously". The books he fictionalizes are not the kind that deal with pressing social problems, and the heavy passions that weave his plots -- hatred, envy, lust, etc. -- are in the final analysis all transposed into cerebral games: "I had imagined the fight as a chaos of steel, instead, I was able to follow it, or almost follow it [inconclusiveness], as though it were a game of chess" ("The Meeting," dG, p. 181). This playfulness on the part of Borges' persona indicates the mood we the readers must adopt in order to approach his fiction correctly. Borges' persona wants our minds to play with his, nothing more. The endlessness of the universe cannot possibly be discerned if the mind remains riveted to finite human matters. The Borgian discoverer thrives on the sport of discovering for its own sake.²²

Like Shih Huang Ti, the hero of "The Wall and the Books," Borges proposes the founding of "an immortal dynasty" enclosed within the perimeters of the fictional garden. He, too, wishes "to re-create the beginning of time" through games and play in the primal paradise of words (OI, p. 4). The delight in the formal elements

²² Carlos Navarro, "The Endlessness in Borges' Fiction," *Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 19, No. 3 (Autumn 1973), pp. 400-1.

of language, in the tricks and magic of fiction, preponderates over the search for meaning, for, to use Borges's quotation from Cartaphilus, "'When the end draws near ... there no longer remain any remembered images; only words remain'" (L, p. 149).

Borges makes little distinction between form and content; his games are formalist exercises which engage the reader in dialogue. The ludic universe of Borges evokes not the troublesome solipsism of Nabokov but it is seriously limited by an acute self-referentiality. Although realizing and articulating the tenebrous, dead-end potential of running the labyrinth and the oppression such an endeavour may create, the author yet reaches toward the structure of aesthetic play, the rhythm of language, the challenge of the game. Steiner, though an admirer of Borges, offers this caveat: "The concentrated strangeness of Borges' repertoire makes for a certain preciousness, a rococo elaboration that can be spellbinding but also airless. More than once, the pale lights and ivory forms of his invention move away from the active disarray of life."²³ To this a critic of "the myth of the postmodernist breakthrough" would counter: "The comic force of characters like 'Funes the Memorios' and of solipsistic worlds such as those of 'Tlön, Uqbar,

²³ Steiner, *Extraterritorial*, p. 43.

Orbis Tertius' lies in the crucial fact that Borges, for all his imaginative sympathy, is *not* Funes, is not an inhabitant of Tlön, and is thus able to view the unreality of their worlds as a predicament." Graff sees Borges's self-reflexive fiction as a critical response to "the historical crisis which brought it about."²⁴ The assumption is that the audience will act with the author in critical rejoinder to the visible unrealities and inhuman distortions of postlapsarian existence. Such response will be found in the infinite dialectic of the Adamic quest, in the belief that consciousness can create a new world, that participation in the process of art will compel attention and confer freedom.

24 Gerald Graff, *Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 56-7.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Robert Coover and Games of the Mind:

Fiction as the Supreme Reality

The fiction of Robert Coover offers perhaps the most sustained and compelling example to date of ludic fiction. Within the group of novels discussed thus far, *The Universal Baseball Association, Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop.* is the closest to absolute play. Nearly all the "action" of the book consists of pure imagined acts in the mind of J. Henry Waugh. Reality is minor and of such subsidiary interest that very little attention is focused beyond the mental horizons of Henry's life. His material existence and place in the world intrude remarkably little in a novel of nearly two hundred and fifty pages; whenever they do assert themselves, the reader is jolted. Traditional grounding in reality or in an established fictional framework is almost entirely absent. There is little reflection of anything beyond the games and play of the mind. Coover's determination on this point is as insouciant as Waugh's is obsessional.

What is absent is any picture of a macrocosmic world beyond the game, such as the broad social backdrop in *The Magus* and *Lolita*, or the playing against traditional novels and fictional techniques, as in *Ada* and the fictions of John Barth, particularly *The Sot-Weed Factor*. There are no serious, scholarly, philosophical

digressions in the manner of musings which dominate the short stories of Borges. In fact, an artistic insistence centres nearly every word and idea on the game itself. Pure play controls the fiction and overwhelms the reader. The refuge of Eden is literally a game of words. Everything is refracted through the game and the mind of its creator. The stark and sometimes tedious fact of this fiction is that nothing happens and a world is thought. The idea is the supreme reality. And the rest of the world is safely ignored. A clue to the aesthetic orientation of Coover against any form of artistic utility and toward play is provided on the frontispiece of the novel. It is a quotation from Kant's *Critique of Judgement*: "It is here not at all requisite to prove that such an *intellectus archetypus* is possible, but only that we are led to the Idea of it ..."

Indeed, Coover's work delineates an idealistic theory of art in which play becomes both process and product of a new Eden, an Eden of words, a paradisiac realm of freedom in the mind. The aesthetic principles of play posit a transcendent landscape; they bring man away from the chaos of the urban jungle into an Edenic sanctuary of untrammelled consciousness. Thought is then free to create life and to make man fully human as it releases him from the alienation of labour in the postlapsarian world. If work in the modern world is stultifying, then the Adamic quest

for being truly at home with oneself involves the freedom of play. This is what Henry feels every time he leaves the office and journeys home to the world of mind -- "Once in the elevator, going down, he was able to forget about work altogether. He was headed for home, returning to his league and all its players, to the Book and tonight's big story, and there weren't any Horace Zifferblatts there".¹ Henry is only fully alive and himself when he is at play creating his own world. This passage and others remind us that Coover is in full agreement with Schiller when the latter avers that

man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays. This proposition, which at the moment may sound like a paradox, will take on both weight and depth of meaning once we have got as far as applying it to the twofold earnestness of duty and destiny. It will, I promise you, prove capable of bearing the whole edifice of the art of the beautiful, and of the still more difficult art of living. But it is, after all, only in philosophy that the proposition is unexpected; it was long ago alive and operative in the art and in the feeling of the Greeks, the most distinguished exponents of both; only they transferred to Olympus what was meant to be realized on earth. Guided by the truth of that same proposition, they banished from the brow of the blessed gods all the earnestness and effort which furrow the cheeks of mortals, no less than the empty pleasures which preserve the smoothness of

1 Robert Coover, *The Universal Baseball Association, Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop.* (New York: New American Library, 1968), p. 44. Subsequent references are to this edition and will appear in parentheses.

a vacuous face; freed those ever-contented beings from the bonds inseparable from every purpose, every duty, every care, and made idleness and indifference the enviable portion of divinity -- merely a more human name for the freest, most sublime state of being. Both the material constraint of natural laws and the spiritual constraint of moral laws were resolved in their higher concept of Necessity, which embraced both worlds at once; and it was only out of the perfect union of those two necessities that for them true Freedom could proceed.²

For the hero of *USA* to be fully human and to be free means to create a vivid world of beauty and play through the games of fiction. Henry Waugh is a citizen of a depressing society conceived by Coover as the tenebrous realm of the contemporary American scene. He is as much a victim of late capitalism as anyone. He is jostled to work on a crowded bus filled with unsmiling faces, and when he gets to the office he is jolted anew by the supervision of an officious boss. At work he does not have a minute when he is wholly human or free; he is there simply to fulfill the demands and needs of someone else, which are imposed on him. All the other workers proceed like drones in a beehive, but Henry has the idea of regaining himself through the artful play of a self-created universe. This means he is abnormal in the context of his society. He sets out for the world of mind, the terrain of Coover's

² Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson et al, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 107-9.

ludic fiction. For him, as for Huck Finn, the merits of civilized society are not worth the oppression they entail. The path Waugh takes leads him away from the alienated labour of the accountancy firm of Dunkelmann, Zauber & Zifferblatt, and toward the Adamic play of a golden age of games.

Baseball is the central game and dominant motif of this novel, and from that premise alone there are certain ineluctable corollaries to be drawn. The most important of these is that baseball is the native American game and as such it reflects many representative ideas of the society which enshrines it. The rituals of a nation are involved. Thus it provides a core ideology embraced by America about itself, and moreover, it supplies a host of game metaphors for life. Businessmen speak of "ballpark estimates," "teamwork," and "striking out" with a common and immediate understanding of the metaphors employed. If Coover is an American novelist writing about the national sport, it may fairly be assumed that he is also writing about the dreams and realities of the nation. Knowing the received opinions about the myth of the American Eden discussed in earlier chapters, we can see that this writer is also postulating the illusions of the American dream, in this instance by means of the device of the "all-American game". Hence descriptions of the game take on the studied examination of reality, and the reality demonstrates the

false geography of the conceptualized American Eden. Yet the destruction of a localized Eden allows the fullness of another Eden, that play world of the mind. Society creates an exiguity for man, and man creates, must create, everything for himself. What this means is that man becomes his own god, as Schiller explains it, as he creates the example of his own divinity, a self-contained universe of freedom and play, a garden (or ball park) of the absolute idea. Unlike anywhere else in society, in his apt of play Waugh is a free agent and fully human. He controls this realm, it obsesses him but it does not coerce him like the imposed tasks of Horace Zifferblatt. Through his artistry and mastery of the game, Henry is agent and manager, pitcher and batter, hero and chorus, destroyer, creator, and sole proprietor and possessor of his mind and being. In short, he is free.

Freedom and play become symbiotic adjuncts in Coover's fiction. What he renders is an epic paean to play. The novel opens in medias res, with a roll of the dice near the completion of a perfect game. The aura is one of intense excitement, with an air of imminent triumph and celebration. There is a sense of harmony and the mythic quality of "timeless gestures passed" (p. 3). Certainly Henry feels a happiness and a freedom from time and space, from the limitations of his physical confines, as he jovially basks in the

imagined sun of the ball park, a sun placed there not by God but simply by force of mind. This prelapsarian state of contentment, oneness, and bliss is only felt by Henry when he is at play, when he momentarily regains the primal freedom of the Edenic experience, a state secured for him by the artistic pursuit. For Henry, as for Coover, artful play leads to the garden, it achieves immortality, and it even makes history; that is to say, it redeems the past and makes possible the future as it fulfills the present. The opening passage of *UBA* is evocative of this magical force of the game as it emphasizes the freedom of the child's world of play and the harmony of "the old days," of the golden age of unalienated being, wherein nothing is other or separate from the self, where there are no barriers but rather unqualified unity:

Bottom half of the seventh, Brock's boy had made it through another inning unscratched, one! two! three! Twenty-one down and just six outs to go! and Henry's heart was racing, he was sweating with relief and tension all at once, unable to sit, unable to think, *in there, with them!* Oh yes, boys, it was on! He was sure of it! More than just another ball game now: *history!* And Damon Rutherford was making it. Ho ho! too good to be true! And yes, the stands were charged with it, turned on, it was the old days all over again, and with one voice they rent the air as the Haymaker Star Hamilton Craft spun himself right off his feet in a futile cut at Damon's third strike -- zing! whoosh! zap! *OUT!* Henry laughed, watched the hometown Pioneer fans cheer the boy, cry out his name, then stretch -- not just stretch -- *leap up* for luck. He saw beers bought and drunk, hot dogs eaten, timeless gestures passed. Yes,

yes, they nodded, and crossed their fingers and knocked on wood and clapped their hands, and laughed how they were all caught up in it, witnessing it, how he was all caught up in it, this great ball game, event of the first order, tremendous moment: *Rookie pitcher Damon Rutherford, son of the incomparable Brock Rutherford, was two innings -- six outs -- from a perfect game!* Henry, licking his lips, dry from excitement, squinted at the sun high over the Pioneer Park ...

... his eye was on the game, on the great new Rookie pitcher Damon Rutherford, seeking this afternoon his sixth straight win ... and maybe more. Maybe: immortality (pp. 3-4).

Immediately, as soon as one picks up the book and starts to read, comes the realization that the fiction of the game is presented as the main fiction of the novel. In a basic sense, it is the novel, and this is reinforced by the fact that the hero does not stand apart from the action but rather is united with it. He has the fresh exuberance of the child as he becomes "one of the boys". He takes on the personae of his characters as he not only conceives but executes the plays of the ball game. He is in the grandstand, on the pitcher's mound, behind home plate, and finally, there is the image of him sitting at his kitchen table behind a pile of papers. Rarely does reality interfere with the illusion of the game, yet when it does, it is felt fully as an intrusion, almost as an undefended digression, as when Henry goes outside to buy a pastrami sandwich at the neighbourhood delicatessen, or when he uses the bathroom. For the reader as for Henry, the job

at Zifferblatt's is a gross intrusion and an alien act. Thus quotidian reality, society, the external world, the laws of nature, form a subplot of easily disregarded import. They obtain little sense of actuality, for what is really actualized in this fiction is the ideal of play and freedom therein. Henry plays in order to re-conceive the world in his own image, so that nothing is external to himself. In doing so, the protagonist follows the route prescribed for aesthetic fulfillment and noted by Hegel in the following passage:

Now the fundamental conception to be stressed in relation to art for this whole sphere lies briefly in the following: Man, on the particular and finite side of his needs, wishes, and aims, stands primarily not only in a *general* relation to external nature, but more precisely in a relation of *dependence*. This relativity and lack of freedom is repugnant to the ideal, and man can become an object for art only if he is first freed from this labour and distress, and has cast off this *dependence* ... In these cases he must work out his necessary satisfaction by his own activity; he must take possession of things in nature, arrange them, form them, strip off every hindrance by his own self-won skilfulness, and in such a way that the external world is changed into a means whereby he can realize himself in accordance with all his aims ...

From the ideal ground of art the distress of life must be banished. In so far as possession and affluence afford a situation in which poverty and labour vanish, not merely momentarily but entirely, they are therefore not only not unaesthetic, but they rather coincide with the Ideal ... For the genuine ideal consists not only in man's being in general lifted above the grim seriousness of dependence on these external circumstances, but in his standing in the midst of a superfluity which permits him

to play freely and cheerfully with the means put at his disposal by nature.³

To play freely is for Henry the diametrical opposite of engaging in alienated labour. Coover sets up a pair of antinomic motifs, play and work, which challenge and elucidate each other in the course of the narrative. Indeed, as the two forces clash and play against themselves, they present an opposition of striking thematic import. When at play with his art, Henry is like Damon, whom he describes as fully integrated and wholly unalienated, that is, as "His own man, yet at home in the world, part of it, involved, every inch of him a participant, maybe that was all it was: his total involvement, his oneness with the UBA. Henry mused, fingering the dice" (p. 9). And when he fingers the dice and makes his plays which propel the game forward, this is how Henry feels as well. He is in possession of himself and is wholly self-determining; in his Eden of play he does not have to obey the extraneous demands of a scowling boss and an intrusive time clock. He sees that work inhibits freedom, it denies play, it trivializes the ludic impulse, and on a more concrete level, it proscribes enjoyment.

To Henry, work becomes an octopus threatening to

3 G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. by T.M. Knox, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), Volume I, pp. 256-7.

overtake his life unless he pursues the exciting, compelling dynamic of the game. It is true that the game dominates his working and sleeping hours, but Coover's protagonist would rather be impelled by play than coerced by work which he does not even enjoy. According to Coover, work means people are alien to themselves, that they forfeit control over their own existence. It means that people cannot go out for a bit of entertainment because the ritual of getting up early for work forbids it: "The bar was nearly empty, not surprising; Tuesday, a working night, only six or seven customers, faces all familiar, mostly old-timers on relief" (p. 21). Work means labouring by the sweat of one's brow against the desires and needs of the self; it entails the denial of self in support of the mechanism of production. On the other hand, play commits one to a golden land, to an Eden of mind. It is, like "the record book was, above all, a catalogue of possibilities ...". Play and the game present the potential "to do something, no matter how small a thing, with absolute unqualified utterly unsurpassable *perfection!*" (p. 23). Sex and play, freedom, fantasy, and imagination, all are antithetical to work. Essentially, work is antithetical to Henry's humanity as it defines the power of limitation:

Oh, that's a game, Henry! *That's really a great old game!*

So that was how and why it was that Henry showed up that Wednesday at the offices of

Dunkelmann, Zauber & Zifferblatt, Licensed Tax & General Accountants, Specializing in Small Firms, Bookkeeping Services & Systems, Payrolls & Payroll Taxes, Monthly, Quarterly & Annual Audits, Enter Without Knocking, somewhat after the lunch hour, and there was just no doubt that the third-named and last-surviving of the firm's partners, Mr. Horace (n) Zifferblatt, Fiduciary Expert and Adjutant of Minor Industry, had his dander up. Of course, he had his reasons. Zifferblatt was a militant clock-watcher, and Henry's record of late had been none too good. And then there'd been that disturbance back during the last pennant scramble when Henry, distracted, worrying about injuries on the Keystone pitching staff, had posted to the general and subsidiary ledgers of one firm the journal entries of another. Whole quarter's worth. So: might as well expect the worst. Still, in spite of his lifelong reverence for hard work and dependability, and that letting-the-team-down guilt he'd always suffered after such lapses, today he found he just didn't care. No, Henry walked today in a perfect vault of well-being, crystalline and impenetrable, and there was nothing the wrath of Zifferblatt could do to crack it (p. 35).

The power of play elevates Henry into a new world and it gives him an enlightened, a superior, consciousness. Thus he enters a universe freed from the manipulation of the marketplace and its mechanical coercion. Men when they work are like robots and in the process of labour they deny themselves and their needs. The picture Coover draws is close to the one of repression and alienation described by Marcuse:

For the vast majority of the population, the scope and mode of satisfaction are determined by their own labor; but their labor is work for an apparatus which they do not control, which operates as an independent power to which individuals must submit if they want to live. And it becomes the more alien the more specialized the division of labor

becomes. Men do not live their own lives but perform pre-established functions. While they work, they do not fulfill their own needs and faculties but work in *alienation* ...⁴

Yet the dialectical process and the strength of contradiction guarantee that the concept of labour must imply the notion of freedom and play. To stand outside the garden is to know the true essence of the potential within. As Marcuse continues:

However, progressive alienation itself increases the potential of freedom: the more external to the individual the necessary labor becomes, the less does it involve him in the realm of necessity. Relieved from the requirements of domination, the quantitative reduction in labor time and energy leads to a qualitative change in the human existence: the free rather than the labor time determines its content. The expanding realm of freedom becomes truly a realm of play -- of the free play of individual faculties. Thus liberated, they will generate new forms of realization and of discovering the world, which in turn will reshape the realm of necessity, the struggle for existence.⁵

Hence for Coover's protagonist, art is the antipode conjured and predicated by the burden of labour. It is important to note how the metaphors of work and play interchange with and transform each other in Henry's mind. Since his language is dependent on the words and framework of play, he sees alienated work as bad,

4 Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (New York: Vintage, 1962), p. 41.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 203-4.

unsuccessful, unhappy play, and then, again within the boundaries of his own mind, he converts the bad play into a more joyful part of his game. Thus he borrows proper names from the working world and transfers them to the context of the game. And even while under the compulsion of the accountancy job, "His mind kept drifting back to his kitchen table". Free play means "the perfect game. The boy with the magic arm" (p. 43). The only way the nugatory state of contemporary society becomes real and acceptable to Henry is when he removes it to his ludic realm, that is, when he converts the external world to a creation of mind, as Hegel suggested:

The rain tumbled like gentle applause on his umbrella. Under it he walked, skirting the puddles, dry in the deluge, as though glassed in under a peaked black dome. Hunched-up cars pushed through the streets like angry defeated ballplayers jockeying through crowds on their way to the showers. Henry waited at a corner for a red light. Offices emptied out, filling the streets. A policeman in a slicker stood stoically in the thick of the traffic, blowing his whistle and jerking his arms like a base coach urging a runner on. The light changed to green and Henry crossed over to his bus stop. Green. Slicker. Cop. Copper Greene. Might try it. Have to jot it down when he got home.

Everywhere he looked he saw names. His head was full of them. Bus stop. Whistle-stop. Whistlestop Busby, second base. Simple as that. Over a storefront across the street: Thornton's. He'd been looking for a name to go with Shadwell, and maybe that was it. Thornton Shadwell. Tim's boy. Pitcher like the old man? Probably. But a lefty. Will he play for the Stones? No. Unless the old man gets sacked this year. His Keystones were in a slump. Manager of the Year last year, in trouble this. Life

was fast and brutal. More likely, Mel Trench's Excelsiors will grab young Shadwell up. Outstanding prospect (p. 46).

Not only are the images of work transferred to and enlivened by play. Through play, they become the stuff of fiction, the material of art. Work itself is examined and pushed to a higher realm when it is conceived outside the bounds of alienation. Significantly, Henry refers to his world of play as his "work" -- everyone thinks he is "moonlighting" in order to make more money, that he has greedily taken on a second job in the evening. Yet Henry is not working in the present sense that makes work a correlate of divorce from the self. His "work" is that of unalienated labour and hence it is play. The difference between the two terms is thus clarified, as both involve, through this dialectical synthesis, seriousness, freedom, and the integration of the individual with what is external to himself. Work becomes play as it proceeds away from utility and finite constraint toward the realm of the infinite and the unlimited, that is, as it moves toward freedom. It is in this sense that one can truly speak of the work of art as play. The limitations of the postlapsarian workaday world propel man toward the far reaches of a progressive transformation in the Edenic realm of mind. The concrete finiteness of labour necessitates the Adamic quest for freedom and the infinite, away from the confines of work and the

laws of our limiting physical nature. Such is the progress of man toward art and in support of a higher level of civilization. As Schiller explains it, man moves away from utility and determinate action (alienated labour) toward the Eöenic sphere of beauty, Infinity, and Freedom:

By means of aesthetic culture, therefore, the personal worth of a man, or his dignity, inasmuch as this can depend solely upon himself, remains completely indeterminate; and nothing more is achieved by it than that he is henceforth enabled by the grace of Nature to make of himself what he will -- that the freedom to be what he ought to be is completely restored to him.

But precisely thereby something Infinite is achieved. For as soon as we recall that it was precisely of this freedom that he was deprived by the one-sided constraint of nature in the field of sensation and by the exclusive authority of reason in the realm of thought, then we are bound to consider the power which is restored to him in the aesthetic mode as the highest of all bounties, as the gift of humanity itself. True, he possesses this humanity *in potentia* before every determinate condition into which he can conceivably enter. But he loses it in practice with every determinate condition [utilitarian production or labour] into which he does enter. And if he is to pass into a condition of an opposite nature, this humanity must be restored to him each time anew through the life of the aesthetic.⁶

The heart of humanity and of aesthetics centres on the paradise of play, and as such it is forever distinguishable from alienated labour. As Kant firmly suggests, "We look on the former [art] as something

⁶ Schiller, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

which could only prove final (be a success) as play, i.e. an occupation which is agreeable on its own account; but on the second [handicraft] as labour, i.e. a business, which on its own account is disagreeable (drudgery), and is only attractive by means of what it results in (e.g. the pay), and which is consequently capable of being a compulsory imposition."⁷ In art man can discover a unique source of freedom, play, and immense creative potential.

Thus Henry develops into the agent of his own divinity and of infinite possibility, like "one of the new breed of radical Caseyites, heretical sect attempting to bring back the golden age ..., celebrate the mystery of Casey's uniqueness; his essential freedom, God active in man ..." (p. 222) It is in such a manner that the life of the UBA can be rejuvenated, that the excitement and wonder of the game can be recaptured after the death of Damon, the slump of interest, and the imposition of new mechanical devices by Chancellor Fenn McCaffree. The promise of the aesthetic experience signifies continual rebirth and renewal through the transforming power of artful play and the revolutionary force of mind. Despite the imposition of marketplace ethics, cost-benefit analysis,

7 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952, rpt. 1973), p. 164.

"distribution functions," and television monitors -- machines in the garden -- as if "Fenn had somehow forgot the game was baseball" (p. 146), the spontaneous enthusiasm of the game is recovered by Henry as he omits the statistical breakdowns and settles into pure play. The idea of baseball and the aesthetic moment of Henry's original creation are then free to assert themselves anew and to impel the ludic cycle forward. Eden is maintained, "alive in the sun," with boys, crowds, cheers, and a timeless vibrancy (p. 242).

To achieve an idealistic Eden of art, an important distinction must be made between the games and play of art and those games and play which involve no aesthetic goal but only the reward of immediate sensuous enjoyment. The actual game of baseball is finite and it propels no one toward a ludic paradise. The quintessence of the Edenic moment is located rather in the creative capacity of mind and the transforming strength of the idea. The mind is properly and uniquely the realm of the infinite; it is the power of mind alone which creates art and life. Hence the fertile ground of play remains the territory of the ideal, that is, of the mind. What the mind and art postulate is the idea of the game, the concept itself. Not only does the mind identify the harmony of play; it, moreover, contains it. Coover elucidates this issue when he has Henry declare that the actual game of baseball bores him, that he never

wanted to be a professional ballplayer, that he never follows real games, and that the most interesting part of baseball happened over one hundred years ago when the game was being conceived:

"I, I didn't know you kept up with baseball, Henry, how ...?"

"I don't."

"But ...?"

"Oh, sometimes I like to read about it. But the real action was over a century ago. It's a bore now."

"You don't go to games, real ones?"

"Not for years now. The first game I saw, Lou, the league's best pitcher that year threw a three-hit shutout. His own team got only four hits, but three were in one inning, and they won, 2-to-0. Fantastic game. And I nearly fell asleep. I kept going back for a while. There were things about the games I liked. The crowds, for example. I felt like I was part of something there, you know, like in church, except it was more *real* than any church, and I joined in in the score-keeping, the hollering, the eating of hot dogs and drinking of Cokes and beer, and for a while I even had the funny idea that ball stadiums and not European churches were the real American holy places." Formulas for energy configurations where city boys came to see their country origins dramatized, some old lost fabric of unity ... act that never quite came off. "But I would leave a game, elbowing out with all the others, and feel a kind of fear that I could so misuse my life; what was the matter with me, that I could spend unhappy hours at a ball park, leave, and yet come back again? Then, a couple days later, at home, I would pick up my scoreboard. Suddenly, what was dead had life, what was wearisome became stirring, beautiful, unbelievably real ..."

"But why did you stop ...?"

"I found out the scorecards were enough. I didn't need the games" (pp. 165-6).

The imposition of form upon the idea of baseball in the mind of Henry generates the basis of the creative act. When Henry takes up the scorecard and conceives rules, histories, social events, and laws of play for the ludic notion in a self-contained mental activity and in words and language, then it may truly be said that he is playing in the aesthetic sense. The freedom of this artistic play is controlled by formal laws and rules of the game, in the same way that poetry, even free verse, develops according to certain technical guidelines. For Henry, the game in his mind contains the "proper response to the immortal lust for sentiment and pattern" (p. 230). It makes him, like one of his characters, a "Research Specialist in the Etiology of Homo Ludens" (p. 233). Significantly, the last chapter of the novel emphasizes the need for pattern, although not in the manner of intransigence or mindless allegiance to rules. It is the gamesplayer Raspberry Schultz who talks of "'legend, I mean the pattern of it, the long history, it seems somehow, you know, a folk truth, a radical truth, all those passed-down-mythical --'"; and he further avers, "'I don't know if there's really a record-keeper up there or not, Paunch. But even if there weren't, I think we'd have to play the game as though there were" (p. 233, p. 239).

In this context we can recall the apposite caveat of Kant, that "It is not amiss, however, to remind the reader of this: that in all free arts something of a compulsory character is still required, or, as it is called, a *mechanism*, without which the soul, which in art must be free, and which alone gives life to the work, would be bodyless and evanescent (e.g. in the poetic art there must be correctness and wealth of language, likewise prosody and metre)."⁸ Schiller makes a similar though more detailed distinction about the nature of aesthetic play. This distinction bears similarity to that of Coover, when the author has Henry discriminate, as in the passage quoted above, between the physical play of actual baseball and the higher play of the creative mind. Schiller observes:

Like the bodily organs in man, his imagination, too, has its free movement and its material play, an activity in which, without any reference to form, it simply delights in its own absolute and unfettered power. Inasmuch as form does not yet enter this fantasy play at all, its whole charm residing in a free association of images, such play -- although the prerogative of man alone -- belongs merely to his animal life, and simply affords evidence of his liberation from all external physical compulsion, without as yet warranting the inference that there is any autonomous shaping power within him. From this play of freely associated ideas, which is still of a wholly material kind, and to be explained by purely natural laws, the imagination, in its attempt at a free form, finally makes the leap to aesthetic play.

⁸ Kant, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

A leap it must be called, since a completely new power now goes into action; for here, for the first time, mind takes a hand as lawgiver in the operations of blind instinct, subjects the arbitrary activity of the imagination to its own immutable and eternal unity, introduces its own autonomy into the transient, and its own infinity into the life of sense.⁹

For Coover, to be moved by a spontaneous flow of freedom and spiritual energy is requisite for the artistic process, yet without the formal structure such a dynamic is meaningless. Ideally, art involves the "free association of images," but as Schiller suggests, it cannot stop there. Play, to be aesthetic, must also include the negative freedom of self-imposed laws and the rigours of a self-evolved form. The player, or artist, may very well act, "not because it's a rule of the game, but because he feels drawn" (p. 241). Nevertheless, beyond the playful instinct and the aesthetic idea, there is the mind which controls and imposes form and pattern. Ludic fiction, like the game proposed by Casey, is empty, static, and impassive without a formal framework to support it. For aesthetic play to be free it must be conditioned by its own set of rules, issued from within, yet flexible and universal. Eden cannot be ascribed to an amorphous condition of confusion and chaos:

Casey, in his writings, has spoken of a "rising above the rules," an abandonment of all conceptualizations, including score-

⁹ Schiller, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

keepers, empires, Gods in any dress, in the heat of total mystic immersion in that essence that includes God and him equally. Of course, some say he never wrote it, it's all apocryphal, inventions of Monday and his Universalists, distorted by redactions without number, but no matter, the idea itself remains. What it leads to, though, is inaction, a terrible passivity ... (p. 240)

If on the one hand, there is the destructive, artless anarchy of Casey's position, and on the other, the oppressive restrictions of Zifferblatt's iron laws, then what Henry must do is steer a course clear of both impediments, a path leading to a new world order of self-governing freedom. What Henry learns from Lou marks a renewal of the game, for Lou imposes a sort of organized innocence on Henry's elaborately codified ludic structure. Lou retains the enthusiasm of the beginner, of a traveller fresh upon a strange new land. He enlivens the game by taking more chances than Henry and by not playing by the rules. Henry's problem stems from the external mechanisms -- the machines in the garden of play -- which he has imposed, inflexibly and obsessively, on the free flow of play. By ascribing functions and a narrow purposiveness onto the ludic structure, Henry nearly strips it of its play element. By allowing characters like Fenn McCaffree to take over, Henry lets the game develop into the alienated process of a business, and as such the game loses the essence of play and becomes an object of utility. Henry's notion of games and play is in danger of

becoming like Zifferblatt's idea of work -- hard, dry, and devoid of freedom, truly a false Eden and non-aesthetic. The nemesis of the ludic realm is in minds like that of Zifferblatt, where everything translates into a cost-related material with a desiccated utility:

"Well, then, accept a little advice, my friend. Accounting like baseball is an art and a science and a rough competitive business. Some make it and some don't. The ones who make it keep their heads up, their eyes open, their minds on their job, and pull their part without belly-aching. Wages are based on *performance*, Mr. Waugh, and what we want around her at DZ&Z is *professionals!*" He paced the room, getting worked up. "What we expect, we give. This is the *American way*, Mr. Waugh! Why, old Marty Dunkelmann here never quit till the moment he died! I can still remember how I came to the office that morning and found him in here, bolt upright in his chair, eyes rolled back, and one finger on an error in a column of accounts receivable. He'd showed me that mistake just the night before, the only one I've made in fifty years of accounting; we were partners but we expected just as much out of each other as we did from any employee; he must've died while I was walking out the door! I'd been sitting right where you -- Waugh! Mr. Waugh! Wake up! (pp. 138-9)

In his more obsessive moments, Henry edges precariously close to Zifferblatt's point of view, to a utility-inspired purge of the Edenic landscape of games and play. Damon Rutherford, Henry's *alter ego* and an obvious Adamic figure in his youthful great promise, is destroyed by Henry's allegiance to the rules of the game, to the "Extraordinary Occurrences Chart". And it is the rule-inspired death of Damon which nearly causes the destruction of the game for

Henry, as it "cuts him off from any sense of wonder or mystery, makes life nothing more than getting by with the least pain possible, and somehow ... such a life seems less than human" (p. 240). To lose aesthetic play is to lose one's humanity. What Henry decides to do is to save the game by killing off Casey, the killer of Damon, and thus, symbolically, his position of anarchy. This is how Henry restores the paradise of play, the "sandy diamond, green grass, ballplayers under the sun, stadium of fans ..." (p. 201)

The antithesis of the aesthetic Eden of ludic fiction establishes itself as the straining force of utility, of an end or goal in the real world. Clearly, for Coover, the aesthetic purpose is achieved intrinsically, within itself and on its own terms, according to the freedom of self-imposed form. This is why the "teamwork" adumbrated by Zifferblatt proves so false and ludicrous. It also explains why the profit-making notions and production jargon have no meaning for the game in Henry's mind, and lead only to its near disintegration. In this context we can understand the emptiness of the American Eden as it is articulated by Zifferblatt and as it forms a central motif of the novel. This America is a false Eden because it is based not on the concepts of artful play, freedom, and a new relationship with the world and with nature, but rather on the survival of the fittest and the strangulation ideology of

destructive competition. Hence the contemporary America described by Coover wholly loses the concept of an expansive new world, particularly when we watch unhappy workers jostle each other in crowded buses, push at lunch counters, and rush away from work as soon as they are allowed. Henry's observations of his fellow workers recall the deadly alienation of a similar description in *The Waste Land*:

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.¹⁰

The external world offers no anodyne and contemporary society no relief. Waugh's peers undergo an analogous ritual of customary and ineluctable bleakness:

The bus was jammed, they had to stand.
People jostled, rammed them moistly toward
the rear. Rain drummed on the roof. If
skyscrapers were penis-prisons, what were
the buses? the efferent tubes? The driver
barked orders. Passengers protested at the
shoving. Lou was the biggest in sight, so
everybody turned their darkest looks on him.
A woman complained about getting elbowed,
and though it wasn't Lou's fault, he tipped
his hat in apology, dripping water from the
brim onto the evening paper of a man sitting
next to them. The paper spoke blackly of
bombs, births, wars, weddings, infiltrations,
and social events. "You know, Lou," Henry
said, "you can take history or leave it,
but if you take it you have to accept certain
assumptions or ground rules about what's left
in and what's left out" (p. 49).

¹⁰ T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, in *Selected Poems* (London: Faber, 1954), lines 60-65.

What is left out of reality and the utilitarian thrust of society is the essential freedom and play achieved by art. In this sense the importance of artistic play and illusion is realized. The order of *semblance*, of illusion, is a primary aspect of Schiller's aesthetic theory, and it is also a dominant part of the ludic concept of the contemporary novel. The notion elucidates the particular propensity of Coover in *UBA* for the epistemology of mind and the values of illusion over the concreteness of reality, and will perhaps lend perspicuity to the Modernist movement against verisimilitude in fiction. The contemporary writers of ludic fiction share a common preoccupation with semblance, with the pure play of illusion as a final goal in itself without reference to the external world and the ethos of utility. The meaning of semblance is tied to the necessity of form, pattern, and design in allowing aesthetic play to occur. Schiller employs the term "Schein" as the distinguishing element which separates aesthetic works and phenomena from all things non-aesthetic. Although the word contains a certain ambiguity in German, "Schein" is used by Schiller "as a master-concept in his aesthetic 'system'" and "to distinguish art from reality". Moreover, for Schiller, "*Schein* only has existence in the world of forms, Ideas, or 'shades'".¹¹ Semblance was

¹¹ Wilkinson and Willoughby, "Schein" entry in "Glossary," *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, p. 328.

nothing in common with utility or the external world, and it shares much with Kant's observation, "That the delight in an object on account of which we call it beautiful is incapable of resting on the representation of its utility". The idea of semblance also recalls Kant's famous dictum of purposiveness without a purpose, that "*Beauty is the form of finality in an object, so far as perceived in it apart from the representation of an end*".¹²

The dichotomy between illusion and reality which is noticeable in Coover's fiction becomes central to his idea of aesthetic play, then, as it contains and develops the germ of semblance. There is a discordance when Henry merges either his life into art or art into life. The harmony of aesthetic play is disturbed when practical matters intrude, such as when the fabulous, driving excitement of the game withers into the bleak, sterile image of the kitchen table and a stack of papers; or when Henry's characters are engaging in debate and then, suddenly, Lou Engel appears. The Eden of mind exists in word, and in ideas; it is not translatable into actuality. Nor does life exist for art, as the extreme aestheticism of a Wilde would have it. What the ideas of indie fiction and of semblance assure are discrete

¹² Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 69, p. 80.

regions for life and art, existing separately yet with immanent harmony. This realization is central to Henry's sanity and to the strength of Coover's work:

Some people would look on his game, Henry realized, as a kind of running away. Lou, for instance, could not understand why he didn't see more movies or visit museums or join an interesting club or something, and though he could accept the idea of taking on outside work for extra money, he'd probably be astonished to learn about the game. But descending in the building elevator, urethra of his world prison, dropping dejectedly into a kind of private sinkhole, having to return to all that commitment and all that emptiness, Henry was aware that you could see it both ways: Roth's skylighting problems were, in a way, a diversion for him from his own. Sometimes, true, in the heat of a pennant chase, for example, his daytime job could be a nuisance, but over the long haul he needed that balance, that rhythmic shift from house to house, and he knew that total one-sided participation in the league would soon grow even more oppressive than his job at Dunkelmann, Zauber & Zifferblatt (pp. 140-1).

What the Adamic quest in fiction does is to preserve the essence of free play as an autonomous entity, as an eternal moment. As such it bears a close relationship to *semblance*, with its divorce from the external world and its emphasis on the pattern of mind and the creative force of the unencumbered idea, the idea that defines itself on its own terms and plays freely without any reference to a conformance or a reconditioning of external reality. Art signals the freedom and great release from the constraints of time, space, and utility. The Eden of play pursued by Henry can defy the scowl of Zifferblatt, the bleak faces on the city bus, the

rain outside, and the glare of neon lights. The concept of semblance predicates that art is an idealistic realm of mind, which plays freely, evolving from and for itself. Langer clarifies this point when she writes:

Schiller was the first thinker who saw what really makes "Schein," or semblance, important for art: the fact that it liberates perception -- and with it, the power of conception -- from all practical purposes, and lets the mind dwell on the sheer appearance of things. The function of artistic illusion is not "make-believe," as many philosophers and psychologists assume, but the very opposite, disengagement from belief -- the contemplation of sensory qualities without their usual meanings of "Here's that chair," "That's my telephone," "These figures ought to add up to the bank's statement," etc. The knowledge that what is before us has no practical significance in the world is what enables us to give attention to its appearance as such.¹³

Play in the garden eschews practical considerations, didactic messages, and any theory of utility. This is why Henry conceives his game as the antithesis of purposive labour and speculates about Lou's surprise at the non-paid, anti-lucrative nature of his ludic passion. For always the question in postlapsarian society is what function an object performs or how much it costs or what it is worth. Henry rejects this. The value of marketplace exchange does not enter into his paradise of play. For him, the aesthetic moment reaches beyond the selling price. Not finance but the mental realm controls the game of baseball for the

¹³ Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art*, developed from *Philosophy in a New Key* (New York: Scribner's, 1953), p. 49.

protagonist. He resists the impulse to make a profit from the practical value of his creation. To save the game means to obviate the imposed machinery of professional management types like Fenn McCaffree, and also to maintain the Eden of mind as its own distinct activity. The semblance of aesthetic play determines its adamant orientation toward form and beauty. As Schiller explains, "The beautiful is to be neither mere life, nor mere form, but living form, i.e., beauty; for it imposes upon man the double law of absolute formality and absolute reality ... With beauty man shall only play, and it is with beauty only that he shall play".¹⁴ The freedom of art requires the universal acceptance of the importance of play which engenders a supreme fiction:

He [Henry] smiled wryly, savoring the irony of it. Might save the game at that. How would they see it? Pretty peculiar. He trembled. Chill. Felt his forehead. Didn't seem hot. Clammy, if anything. No, it's too crazy. He reached again for the night's scoresheet, but again hesitated He penned in York's and Wilson's home runs on the scoresheet, watched Royce Ingram pick out a bat and stride menacingly to the plate. Now, stop and think, he cautioned himself. Do you really want to save it? Wouldn't it be better just to drop it now, burn it, go on to something else, get working regularly again, back into the swing of things, see movies, maybe copyright that Intermonop game and try to market it, or do some traveling, read books ... (pp. 200-1)

14 Schiller, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

Henry discovers that the semblance of play creates its *raison d'être*, that the innate ludic pattern of the game represents its meaning. When Lou asks, "'Where's the playing board?'" Henry's answer points to the idealism of aesthetic play, an idealism which, of course, eschews the external world: "'Well, you sort of have to imagine it,' Henry said. 'I used to have a mock-up of a ball park,' but it only got in the way'" (p. 181). The closer the game approaches the semblance conferred by artistic awareness, and the further it moves from actual dice-throwing toward pure play idealized in the mind, the closer Henry comes to an Eden of words. The chronicle of the game takes on greater significance as words, images, and language combine, forming the literary endeavour born of play. Again, the writings of Schiller offer insight into the role of man in his form-imposing creative power: "To the extent that he imparts form to matter, and for precisely as long as he imparts it, he is immune to its effects; for spirit cannot be injured by anything except that which robs it of its freedom, and man gives evidence of his freedom precisely by giving form to that which is formless."¹⁵ Henry realizes that true freedom occurs when play is

¹⁵ Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, p. 185.

utility. Thus the Adamic autonomy of the fictional realm is assured through the power of words and ideas to predicate a new world. Henry is free to "play with all these problems," the joyful problems of the creative involvement. Zifferblatt and the ethos of harsh utility now become irrelevant matters of the past. He jokes in song that he is "all washed up" after being fired from the accountancy firm," but he knows the opposite to be true, that he loses nothing and gains the aesthetic capability. He feels free, autonomous, and in control of his own life:

*"Oh yeah, I'm all washed up, boys.
I got the axe. I got the aches ..."*

Not really, though. After Lou had called, Henry had phoned an employment agency where he was registered, told them he was semi-retired and wanted half-time work, starting after Christmas. They asked for an updating of his record, but told him there might be part-time work for an accountant there in the agency itself after the first of the year. And meanwhile, he had a drawerful of checks he'd never cashed. So old Ziff, ho, ho, he sent to hell (p. 213).

For Schiller, semblance comes to mean the play-drive, or *Spieltrieb*, of art, which is achieved in the free, formal arrangement of the poetic or fictional act. Coover, like his protagonist, posits the ludic realm of art as a free process and an immortal state beyond death, beyond postlapsarian utility. Art retrieves the Golden Age, it lets one sport ~~with~~ an Eden of words in full defiance of mortality and decay. Hence the individual deaths within the UBA do not

matter; Henry need not cry or despair over Damon's demise, for the game will continue, *mutatis mutandis*, in an infinite ludic cycle of sun, green grass, excited crowds, and full Edenic renewal.

In this context, we perceive the importance of the "Golden Age" motif as it recurs in the novel, and of the sun images. Most especially, the dominance of the symbolic import of youth takes on extra meaning from the viewpoint of the Edenic myth. The word "boy" is omnipresent. Its ubiquitous quality captures Schiller's notion of the infinity of semblance, since the terms "boy" and "youth" predicate an Edenic continuity of the immortality of art and also connote the essential innocence and enthusiasm of the ludic world. Art is Edenic because within it man achieves the freedom and expansive potential of the child in the garden, freed from the cares and toil of mundane reality. Fiction recaptures the youthful play of man in the primal garden. Through the play of art, man is at one with himself and the outside universe, a free continuous being with nothing alien to himself. Thus the triumph of the aesthetic Eden is that the supreme fiction becomes for those who play in the Adamic garden, the "Supreme Reality". Schiller adumbrates this point with characteristic cogency:

If, then, in one respect the aesthetic mode of the psyche is to be regarded as Nought -- once, that is, we have an eye

to particular and definite effects -- it is in another respect to be looked upon as a state of Supreme Reality, once we have due regard to the absence of all limitation and to the sum total of the powers which are conjointly active within it. One cannot, then, say that those people are wrong either who declare the aesthetic state to be the most fruitful of all in respect of knowledge and morality. They are entirely right; for a disposition of the psyche which contains within it the whole of human nature, must necessarily contain within it *in potentia* every individual manifestation of it too; and a disposition of the psyche which removes all limitations from the totality of human nature must necessarily remove them from every individual manifestation of it as well. Precisely on this account, because it takes under its protection no single one of man's faculties to the exclusion of the others, it favours each and all of them without distinction; and it favours no single one more than another for the simple reason that it is the ground of possibility of them all. Every other way of exercising its functions endows the psyche with some special aptitude -- but only at the cost of some special limitation; the aesthetic alone leads to the absence of all limitation. Every other state into which we can enter refers us back to a preceding one, and requires for its termination a subsequent one; the aesthetic alone is a whole in itself, since it comprises within itself all the conditions of both its origin and its continuance. Here alone do we feel left out of time, and our human nature expresses itself with a purity and integrity, as though it had as yet suffered no impairment through the intervention of external forces.¹⁶

The Edenic myth constitutes, as Schiller outlines for his own argument, both the origin and the continuance of the aesthetic, as man achieves completion by playing freely in ludic fiction. The Adamic quest of the game

16 Schiller, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

comes to symbolize the continuity of history, the blissful harmony of the pastoral, the freedom of the primal world, the transcendent power of the mind, and the timelessness of play. The novel opens with the perfect sport, a hitless, errorless ball game, which Henry labels as the route to immortality. Throughout the book, the perfect game retains an Arcadian significance, as the elusive Eden for which the players strive -- "The perfect game had already sunk away into a kind of unbelievable golden age, long lost, forever inaccessible" (p. 90). Not attainable in reality, the perfect game is yet the bright star for which the players slouch towards Bethlehem, the illusion of fulfillment that covertly lurks as the hope of every game.

The fineness of aesthetic attainment merges with prelapsarian grace in the perfect game which heralds the rediscovered sense of promise for humanity. The perfect game is an epiphany, a rare moment of being, that fallen man mostly only dreams of, but which art can recall in its "catalogue of possibilities". Henry is ecstatic as he exclaims, "'No, but think of it, Hettie, to do a thing so perfectly that, even if the damn world lasted forever, nobody could ever do it better ...'" (p. 23) The paradisiac moment of the perfect game articulates the wonder and harmony of the paradigmatic aesthetic Eden, when time stops and all men play in the organic unity of the natural setting.

What one does not forget is that the mind is the sole agent of this new world:

Top of the ninth.

This was it.

Odds against him, of course. Had to remember that; be prepared for the lucky hit that really wouldn't be lucky at all, but merely in the course of things. Exceedingly rare, no-hitters; much more so, perfect games. How many in history? two, three. And a Rookie: no, it had never been done. In seventeen matchless years, his dad had pitched only two no-hitters, never had a perfect game. Henry paced the kitchen, drinking beer, trying to calm himself, to prepare himself, but he couldn't get it out of his head: *it was on!*

The afternoon sun waned, cast a golden glint off the mowed grass that haloed the infield. No sound in the stands now: breathless. Of course, no matter what happened, even if he lost the game, they'd cheer him, fabulous game regardless; yes, they'd love him, they'd let him know it ... but still they wanted it. Oh yes, how they wanted it! Damon warmed up, throwing loosely to catcher Ingram. Henry watched him, felt the boy's inner excitement, shook his head in amazement at his outer serenity. "Nothing like this before." Yes, there was a soft murmur pulsing through the stands: nothing like it, electrifying, new, a new thing, happening here and now! ... (p. 11)

Henry calls this event the "history-making ball game" (p. 12), and clearly for him, the perfect game marks the renewal of the past history of fallen man in the timeless garden. Henry gives each of his players elaborate histories and interconnected personal relationships. For example, he is able to give Lou a fully detailed background on Archie Moon, and Moon

is not one of his more prominent characters. To establish continuity in securing Schiller's idea of the whole man brought forward and nurtured by the semblance of play in art, this challenge forms a centrally important goal of Henry's game. Through the history of the prelapsarian past, he hopes to engender a move beyond mere recollection to the artistic synthesis. Thus the golden age of baseball, the Brock Rutherford Era, "was *more* than history, it was, it was: fulfillment!" (p. 66) It was art.

The achievement of the game means that man can play anew and that by so doing he reaches a new world, a pastoral harmony of the original garden. In aesthetic play, Henry and his characters "fleet the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world," in a manner somewhat similar to that enjoyed by Shakespeare's players in the Forest of Arden. This pastoral, however, is largely an Eden of mind, yet the basic images recall the poetic paradise of a free and eternal world. The numerous songs in *UBA* remind the reader of the madrigals of the medieval pastoral, albeit in a much coarser fashion. They are imbued with a wistful longing for the golden age, for "the happy sunny da-hays of old" (p. 99).

Yet the alienation of urban life means that the contemporary postlapsarian individual is physically removed from the green garden. Henry comments, "Funny thing about both country music and baseball

with its 'village greens': they weren't really country, not since they got their new names anyway, but urban. Kid stuff, dreams of heroism and innocence, staged by pros and turned into big business" (p. 36). Therefore the idea itself fulfills the Edenic dream by virtue of the mind's creative power. Words and language generate the new Eden, and as Henry has learned, names, i.e., ideas expressed in prose, "seem to predicate reality. Perhaps in this context the obvious pastoral connotations of the various names of the different ball teams are comprehended -- there are the Haymakers, the Rubes, the Pioneers, and the Pastimers. Henry calls Brock, remembering him as the young boy who had come to the city for the game, "just a kid off the farm" (p. 8). Furthermore, it is apparent that the vitality of the game owes much to its illusions of primal, pastoral play maintained by a nostalgic imagination and posited as a central idea of the controlling mind of the artist.

It is exactly such a controlling mind which assumes that "Play remains as an attitude of freedom from subordination to an end imposed by external necessity".¹⁷ Aesthetic play denies necessity as it creates an eternal

¹⁷ John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Putnam, 1958), p. 279. In Chapter XII of this work, Dewey presents an interesting and useful discussion of the theory of art as play.

moment. The centre of the game's import in Barney's (i.e., Henry's) history is seen in "the Rutherford-Casey event as the culminating moment, revolving toward the New Day ... to a moral and philosophical concern with the very nature of man and society ..." The history moves away from time toward the idea of semblance through aesthetic play -- "'What we want in this Association is participation -- not in real time -- but in *significant time!*'" (pp. 216-7) The mind creates history. This is the freedom of the mind effecting a present of ludic fulfillment through a mythical past by assuming an Adamic future which will live vividly out of time. Cuss McCamish hails the new Eden when he exclaims, "'we've been born in a wondrous world, borne to a wondrous pass!'" If, as he continues, "'We are mere ideas,'" then through "the immortal lust for ... pattern" (p. 230), we are also eternal by virtue of the secure infinity of man in art. The aesthetic moment lasts forever, not for one man, but for all men, and through ludic fiction and the game's play, it can endlessly be recaptured:

But on the kitchen table, everything was in order, just as he had left it. Scorecard of the game, final entries scrawled a little excitedly perhaps. The dice still showed Hard John Horvath's grounder to third. In a sense, it was still that moment, and if he wanted to savor it or if he got occupied with something else, it could go on being that moment for weeks. And then, when things got going again, would the players have any awareness of how time had stopped? No ... but they might wonder how

all the details of that moment had got so firmly etched in their minds (p. 52).

Art takes precedence over the ephemeral products of utility, for art alone exists out of time and is able palpably to seize the quest for the immortal. Through the aesthetic Eden, man reaches the ideal of freedom, for as Santayana has noted, "the ideal means that environment in which our faculties would find their freest employment, and their most congenial world".¹⁸ Man takes the world into himself, he subsumes the idea in semblance by giving it a verbal structure and a poetic arrangement.

Henry realizes that for play to be significant, it must seek the universal and the eternal: "To be good, a chess player, too, had to convert his field to the entire universe, himself the ruler of that private enclosure -- though from a pawn's-eye view, of course, it wasn't an enclosure at all, but, infinitely, all there was" (p. 156). The world of ludic fiction becomes for artist and reader alike both microcosm and macrocosm, particular object of perception and expression, and the vehicle of the infinite, of the universal, as well. Aesthetic play assures that the artist is neither confined by the particular nor confused

¹⁸ George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty, Being an Outline of Aesthetic Theory* (New York: Dover, 1955), p. 160.

by the universal. Schiller tells us how the artist must disdain utility as he strives for the eternal Ideal:

Free alike from the futile busyness which would fain set its mark upon the fleeting moment, and from the impatient spirit of enthusiasm which applies the measure of the Absolute to the sorry products of Time, let him leave the sphere of the actual to the intellect, which is at home there, whilst he strives to produce the Ideal out of the union of what is possible with what is necessary. Let him express this ideal both in semblance and in truth, set the stamp of it upon the play of his imagination as upon the seriousness of his conduct, let him express it in all sensuous and spiritual forms, and silently project it into the infinity of time.¹⁹

That fiction should basically consist of the world generated by the mind of the artist is not surprising, for as Croce has established, "works of art exist only in the minds that create or recreate them".²⁰ Ludic fiction does indeed put forward a position of idealism. It sees the mind as superior to and beyond the domain of reality. Furthermore, art must go beyond reality if it is ever to be created at all; it must have a given autonomy before it can properly exist. Even the utilitarian ideology of Fenn McCaffree acknowledged the importance of Edenic play and the fiction it brings forward:

¹⁹ Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, pp. 57-9.

²⁰ Benedetto Croce, "Aesthetics," in *Philosophies of Art and Beauty: Selected Readings in Aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger*, ed. Albert Hofstadter et al (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 567.

Fenn watched their faces. There they were, men turned into boys, whelmed by awe and adolescent wistfulness. In a way, Sandy did them a disservice, provided them with dreams and legends that blocked off their perception of the truth. But what was the truth? Men needed these rituals, after all, that was part of the truth, too, and certainly the Association benefited by them. Men's minds being what they generally were, it was the only way to get to most of them ... (p. 103)

Yet Fenn is still mired in an abyss of utilitarian comparison and general contempt. The underlying reason he permits the Edenic spirit and harmony enjoyed by the players is because it is profitable in economic terms, not because it related to an ultimate freedom of humanity. This is the way many philistines view art; they reduce it to a function of crass purposiveness. But such utilitarian purposiveness disregards aesthetic semblance as it limits art to an item of trade in the marketplace, to a commodity of exchange. Art ranks beyond such paltry considerations, for as Kant asseverates, "there must be no question of anything but pure aesthetic judgements. Consequently examples are not to be selected from such beautiful or sublime objects as presuppose the concept of an end. For then the finality would be either teleological, or based upon mere sensations of an object ... and so, in the first case, not aesthetic, and, in the second, not merely formal".²¹ Either one assumes the intrinsic value and autonomy of the aesthetic

21 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, p. 121.

endeavour, or he ceases to speak of art.

Since for Coover art and fiction are forms of mind, they cannot be judged by the criteria of the external world of utility. To do so would be as if Henry had elevated Horace (n) Zifferblatt to the position of arbiter and critic of his game. Of course, Zifferblatt would be a deficient and incompetent judge. What Henry as artist instinctively understands is that he must transcend the trammels of reality if he is to attain an active role in the creation of the free Edenic realm. The triumph of the mind and of aesthetic play is that they are not limited by reality, for it is not reality which creates consciousness but rather consciousness that engenders reality. Schiller explains the active creative power of the mental Eden and of the Adamic quest in contemporary ludic fiction:

Inasmuch as need of reality and attachment to the actual are merely consequences of some deficiency, then indifference to reality and interest in semblance may be regarded as a genuine enlargement of humanity and a decisive step towards culture. In the first place, this affords evidence of outward freedom: for as long as necessity dictates, and need drives, imagination remains tied to reality with powerful bonds; only when wants are stilled does it develop its unlimited potential. But it affords evidence, too, of inner freedom, since it makes us aware of a power which is able to move of its own accord, independently of any material stimulus from without, and which is sufficiently in control of energy to hold at arm's length the importunate pressure of matter. The reality of things is the work of things themselves; the semblance of things is the work of man; and

a nature which delights in semblance is no longer taking pleasure in what it receives, but in what it does.

It goes without saying that the only kind of semblance I am here concerned with is aesthetic semblance (which we distinguish from actuality and truth) and not logical semblance ...: semblance, therefore, which we love just because it is semblance, and not because we take it to be something better. Only the first is play, whereas the latter is mere deception. To attach value to semblance of the first kind can never be prejudicial to truth, because one is never in danger of substituting it for truth, which is after all the only way in which truth can ever be impaired. To despise it, is to despise the fine arts altogether, the very essence of which is semblance.²²

To deny the separate world of art and its intrinsic value is to reject the aesthetic semblance of fictional play put forward by the mind of the artist and participated in by the reader. To plunge art into the external world of postlapsarian utility is to destroy its reason for being, for the loss of the game and of the world of play equals the loss of paradise, of the pure value of the creative mind, a creative mind nourished not only by individual consciousness but by the universal myths and heritage of all mankind. As Croce has noted:

Those who in the past have denied the absoluteness of the aesthetic judgment ... denied in effect the quality, reality and autonomy of art. It has been asked whether a knowledge of the history of the time ... is necessary for the aesthetic judgment of the art of that time; it certainly is, because ... poetic creation presupposes

²² Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, p. 193.

all the other creations (passions, feelings, customs, etc.) of the given historical moment ... what we call contemporary art and history really belong to the past as much as those of more distant ages, and must like them, be re-created in the present, in the mind ...

... there is nothing to do but ... to treat works of art not in relation to social history (i.e., not as a function of social needs) but as each a world in itself, into which from time to time the whole of history is concentrated, transfigured and imaginatively transcended in the individuality of the poetic work, which is a creation, not a reflection, a monument, not a document.²³

What the Adamic quest emphasizes is the importance of the human mind, of man's creative consciousness, of the innate puissance of the Ideal, and of a golden age of mental freedom honoured by the stories and rituals of the Edenic myth but crushed by the destructive utility of coeval society. Edenic fiction is a protest against the harsh limitations of postlapsarian confinement. Thus this ludic art surveys the full, unlimited universe as the mind gives meaning to it. Fiction remains like Henry's "Official Archives," a Whitmanesque catalogue of the possible, of the infinity of the mind's freedom: "Into the Book went the whole UBA, everything from statistics to journalistic dispatches, from seasonal analyses to general baseball theory. Everything, in short, worth keeping" (p. 55). Like Henry's archives, the paradise of the tale does not deny the world, it contains it. Coover, through Waugh, has compiled an

23 Croce, *op. cit.*, p. 575-6.

autonomous fictional universe; in doing so he articulates the pattern of his own mind. But, moreover, he also explores the potential of all minds, that is, the unlimited promise of the human condition to seek freedom and to find it.

CHAPTER NINE

Thomas Pynchon: Eden versus Entropy

If Edenic art is a protest against the harsh confinements of the postlapsarian world, then one can well argue that the works of Thomas Pynchon present the broadest survey yet of the Adamic quest. There exists a major dialectical contradiction in calling the tenebrous novels of Pynchon "Edenic," and it is this very contradiction which makes such fiction a challenge to the reader, for the author posits a universe in which the ludic impulse is entropy's last obstacle. Games and play, song and dance, cinematic techniques and laughter, are constant preoccupations and essential elements of the Pynchon oeuvre. This is palpably true even in the dark pages of *Gravity's Rainbow*. Language functions as the plaything of the author, and readers exist for requisite manipulation in the maze of words. And the Minotaur being stalked in this fiction of play is the disintegrative force of entropy. Art serves as perhaps the last factor which can deny death and overcome the loss of time, space, and energy. Man's Nabokovian vestige of having only "words to play with" is not a full anodyne for Pynchon, but it is the only one possible, and it stands as a sort of literary Maxwell's Demon reversing time and decay.

The novel *V.*, Pynchon's first, develops a series of labyrinthine quests for the person and meaning of the symbol "V" and as such it is its own perfect image for literary creation. The symbol "V" comes to mean so much that finally it denies effect and discovery and becomes only process. To realize the game and to play it means that one joins an Edenic elect, the postlapsarian heretical Preterite, or those who are saved because they are damned, as William Slothrop of *Gravity's Rainbow* postulated.¹ Adam after the Fall, Oedipa Maas after her Tupperware Party, can attain freedom and eternity only through the word. For Pynchon, the word is wholly literary play, and play, not finality or meaning, is the central experience of art. In fact, the ludic arrangement of his novels is such that the traditional quest for meaning on the part of audience and critic is deliberately foiled. The ludic process of the fiction is its meaning. Art may be "a transcendent puzzle that could lead ... to some moment of light ..."² Levine emphasizes the contradictory challenges of Pynchon's play with words:

But no myth, no multiplication of intellectual possibilities can quite do justice to the energizing experience of

1 Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (London: Pan Books, 1975), p. 554. Future references are to this edition and will appear in parentheses.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 454.

sustaining uncertainty. The full significance of Pynchon's fiction is in its styles, in its language, since the language is called upon to sustain the uncertainty it is structured to deny, to imply what cannot be articulated in language. Pynchon denies resolution into myth by wandering among all the available myths, from those of the Greeks to those of modern science, technology, film, comic books, radio. Verbal and mythic virtuosity is not, in Pynchon, show-off obscuring of what might be made clear, but, in a way, what the books are about; and like almost everything else in Pynchon's world, virtuosity is both a threat and a possibility.³

If one pursues the dictum of Schiller that man is only fully human when he plays, it can readily be seen that this applies dynamically to the fictional figures which Pynchon creates, and of course, to the language upon which all is predicated. Oedipa Maas, perhaps the best drawn and most convincingly human of these characters, does not achieve any sense of herself or her environment until she foregoes the quotidian occupation of suburban housewife and becomes involved in the serious literary games forming the core of *The Crying of Lot 49*, games which begin with the misspelling of a word, and continue into a detailed literary quest.⁴ Oedipa reaches some degree of self-knowledge and human freedom as she pieces together the puzzle of Pierce Inverarity, his ludic bequest to her.

3 George Levine, "Risking the Moment: Anarchy and Possibility in Pynchon's Fiction," in *Mindful Pleasures: Essays on Thomas Pynchon*, ed. by Levine et al. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976) p. 114.

4 Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (New York: Bantam, 1967), p. 30. All references are to this edition and will appear in parentheses.

This study will focus attention on Oedipa Maas and *The Crying of Lot 49*, not only because this character and fiction offer Pynchon's most controlled technique and his most coherent ludic structure. One seizes upon this novel because in it the author powerfully delineates what it means to be fully human, to play in the world of art. Oedipa is, after all, a heroine patterned after Schiller's own dictum. She transcends her urban nightmare of contemporary California as successfully as J. Henry Waugh does his, and like him, she creates her own aesthetic paradise in words and through the literary quest. In addition, Oedipa is a greater figure than Waugh because in her compassion and love for humanity she leaves behind the narrowness of solipsism.

There is a clear basis for contradiction in an Edenic conception of *Lot 49*, for on the surface little seems Edenic. Oedipa is an unhappy housewife locked in a stultifying suburban existence. She lives with a chronically depressed disc jockey husband who is just as chronically and predictably unfaithful to her, and she regularly visits a fascist psychiatrist who would like to use her as a guinea pig in his drug experiments. Although little of Oedipa's life before her naming as executrix is delineated, the reader readily perceives that life as an aimless, routinely suffering one. And it may fairly be assumed from the larger pattern of

Pynchon's fiction that the protagonist's nugatory existence represents the far vaster plight of the universal consciousness of contemporary America.

There is much evidence in the novel to proclaim a dearth of freedom and a depth of despair, a rendezvous with entropy lurking around the corner of the American scene. Thus what Pynchon does is to mark out a territory of despair and conflict. Then, dialectically, he produces a landscape of Eden created by the fertility of words and by ideal play. In this mental landscape, man is the actor, no longer the acted upon; he becomes his own god as he patterns a new world from the ashes of the old. As Pynchon tells us, "There may be no gods, but there is a pattern: names by themselves may have no magic, but the *act* of naming, the physical utterance, obeys the pattern" (GR, p. 322).

Like his mentor Nabokov, Pynchon sardonically portrays people in contemporary American society as they grope to pattern a new world. Oedipa is as typical of the American of the 1960's as Lolita is characteristic of the girl-child and the society of the 1950's. The Edenic quest for Oedipa crucially involves a new epistemology, a changed relationship with coeval society. Pynchon's ironic comedy examines the problems and confusions of life at the edge of this culture and enters more closely into the life of the mind in society. Dickstein alludes to the

preponderance of the mind, to "the belief that old molds can be broken and recast, a sense that reality can be reshaped by the creative will".⁵ In this respect Tanner notes that "The possible existence of The Tristero is ... associated with the possible existence of 'transcendent' meaning, almost equivalent to a redemptive vision of another America behind the material concretions of the land. The Tristero is also associated with that yearning for diversity, a world of unprogrammed possibilities, so persistent in American literature".⁶ Pynchon's ludic realm partakes of the vision of the American Eden, an idea transplanted from the metaphors of geography to the more fertile regions of the mind. As Poirier has written:

This is a distinctly American vision, and Pynchon is the epitome of an American writer out of the great classics of the nineteenth century -- Hawthorne, Emerson, and Melville especially. The vision is not, as has been argued so often, one of cultural deprivation, but rather of cultural inundation, of being swamped, swept up, counted in before you could count yourself out, pursued by every bookish aspect of life even as you try to get lost in a wilderness, in a randomness where you might hope to find your true self.⁷

5 Morris Dickstein, *Gates of Eden* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), p. 99.

6 Tony Tanner, *City of Words* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), p. 178.

7 Richard Poirier, "The Importance of Thomas Pynchon," in *Mindful Pleasures*, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

The barren landscape and the new quest begin on the first page of the novel. Pynchon is laconic and most effectively ironical in his description of the American scene of the 1960's. The "Tupperware party" presents a plenary evocation of banality in suburbia, as does the phrase "too much kirsch in the fondue". Apparently Oedipa is a middle or upper middle class, childless housewife for whom nothing is either productive or necessary, and whose only commitment is toward preparing a cocktail for her husband after he comes home from work. She is a woman who does no work outside the home and who hence can attain virtually no relationship with the external world. Oedipa is a postlapsarian Eve merely subsisting, and her daily life reveals its emptiness. Yet here, too, a contradiction is involved, for there is an undeniable Edenic lyricism in these descriptive phrases, particularly in the bird, sunrise, and music motifs:

One summer afternoon Mrs Oedipa Maas came home from a Tupperware party whose hostess had put perhaps too much kirsch in the fondue to find that she, Oedipa, had been named executor, or she supposed executrix, of the estate of one Pierce Inverarity, a California real estate mogul who had once lost two million dollars in his spare time but still had assets numerous and tangled enough to make the job of sorting it all out more than honorary. Oedipa stood in the living room, stared at by the greenish dead eye of the TV tube, spoke the name of God, tried to feel as drunk as possible. But this did not work. She thought of a hotel room in Mazatlán whose door had just been

slammed, it seemed forever, waking up two hundred birds down in the lobby; a sunrise over the library slope at Cornell University that nobody out on it had seen because the slope faces west; a dry, disconsolate tune from the fourth movement of the Bartók Concerto for Orchestra; a whitewashed bust of Jay Gould that Pierce kept over the bed on a shelf so narrow for it she'd always had the hovering fear it would someday topple on them. Was that how he'd died, she wondered, among dreams, crushed by the only ikon in the house? That only made her laugh, out loud and helpless: You're so sick, Oedipa, she told herself, or the room, which knew (pp. 1-2).

Oedipa has no freedom in the true Hegelian sense because for her everything is alien to the self; she lives in a world of perceived externality of people and objects. She has attained no unity, not even an inner harmony. Hence she must jettison her present life, which is the course of action the play of the fiction fulfills. The novel traces the search for unity and freedom through Oedipa's quest for meaning in the Tristero, in Pierce's will, and in literary puzzles. These elements cause Oedipa to project a world, to forge a new, original, and systematic concord out of the panic and chaos of her milieu. The development of play in the fiction, play both in the mind and in the external world, parallels the movement toward freedom and hope for the human condition.

Pynchon does not let the reader forget that Oedipa's Edenic quest is the reader's own. This is

made explicit by the device of the play within the play of the novel, Randolph Driblette's production of Wharfinger's *The Courier's Tragedy*. Oedipa's floundering in the maze of that Jacobean drama documents the process of art which deliberately involves the compelling mysteries of a game for which there are no answers, in which meaning contains the germ of aesthetic play and little else. From the very beginning of the story the reader identifies with Oedipa, for the tricks and games which envelop the heroine do not fail to enclose the audience as well. Pynchon is the magus, functioning as the transcendent author, the magician of the word, as do likewise Pierce Inverarity and the anonymous masters of the Tristero. For the reader as for Oedipa, it seems as if the more knowledge and involvement one has in the literary game, the more the confusion, the greater the contradiction, and the more complex the Adamic universe. Freedom for Pynchon, as for Borges, connotes often arduous movement through a labyrinth.

For Oedipa, the sewers of the W.A.S.T.E. system are such a labyrinth. Yet before she can enter this maze, there are ritual games to be played. Significantly, the major games of the fiction are centrally literary ones. If there is power, there is not much subtlety in Pynchon's initial use of the Edenic myth in art. An early game, and a notably key one, is the ^{initial} motel scene in which Oedipa first meets the lawyer Metzger.

Her arrival at the Echo Courts Motel heralds the start of an encounter with the gaudy Eden of southern California. The motel offers refuge. It is an oasis set against a nightmare of urban chaos and decay, one reminiscent of the middle America of *Lolita* and the alienated work world of *The Universal Baseball Association*. Thus before entering the ludic ambience, the reader and protagonist alike must pass through the requisite depiction of post-capitalist alienation, the exploitative world of arch-capitalist Inverarity which yet dialectically makes possible the ludic realm as a counteraction against it. The vision of the industrial menace is a puissant one as it cries out its oppression. This occurs strikingly in the first three pages of Chapter Two; here there are passages so replete with implication and allusion that one is tempted to quote them in full. On the top of a hill, Oedipa sits in her car and gazes down upon a neighbourhood of identical yet somehow pleasant and well-tended homes. She senses a concord in the pattern. This scene shares a notable similarity with an already quoted passage in Chapter Thirty-six (pp. 279-80) of *Lolita*. Here also a Wordsworthian unity and freedom come to mind. They are attained transiently and then denied in the more powerful oppression of civilization as we know it in modern cities:

San Narciso lay further south, near

L.A. Like many named places in California it was less an identifiable city than a grouping of concepts . . . She drove into San Narciso on a Sunday, in a rented Impala. Nothing was happening. She looked down a slope, needing to squint for the sunlight, onto a vast sprawl of houses which had grown up all together, like a well-tended crop, from the dull brown earth; and she thought of the time she'd opened a transistor radio to replace a battery and seen her first printed circuit. The ordered swirl of houses and streets, from this high angle, sprang at her now with the same unexpected, astonishing clarity as the circuit card had. Though she knew even less about radios than about Southern Californians, there were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate. There'd seemed no limit to what the printed circuit could have told her (if she had tried to find out); so in her first minute of San Narciso, a revelation also trembled just past the threshold of her understanding. Smog hung all round the horizon, the sun on the bright beige countryside was painful; she and the Chevy seemed parked at the centre of an odd, religious instant. As if, on some other frequency, or out of the eye of some whirlwind rotating too slow for her heated skin even to feel the centrifugal coolness of, words were being spoken (pp. 12-13).

Oedipa's instant of spiritual unity in this passage anticipates the fuller, less vague, and more challenging ludic landscape which, unknown to her, lies ahead. It is the ordered play of art and the structured games of fiction which expand this moment of being and give form to it. Like Waugh's baseball game, Oedipa's ludic creations annihilate all that is alien to the self; they overwhelm the oppressive limitations of the postlapsarian world. If "she left Kinneret ~~with~~ with no idea she was moving toward anything new" (p. 12),

Oedipa nevertheless prepares herself for a new consciousness and a new vision. During her journey she passes the Yoyodyne plant with its barbed wire fences; she glides by dark factory windows and closed office buildings. Her new sensitivity renders this Sunday scene in its total bleakness and horror. The interesting though obvious fact is that this is a scene which Oedipa would have witnessed many times before. Yet now, involved in the beginning of a ludic mystery, she absorbs the essence of the world around her, perhaps for the first time. The exigencies of an Adamic vision compel the protagonist to rush past the haunting panorama of a civilization in its death throes, to escape into an Eden of art, ultimately to re-create a freer world through the play of mind:

To her left appeared a prolonged scatter of wide, pink buildings, surrounded by miles of fence topped with barbed wire and interrupted now and then by guard towers: soon an entrance whizzed by, two sixty-foot missiles on either side and the name YOYODYNE lettered conservatively on each nose cone ...

Barbed wire again gave way to the familiar parade of more beige, prefab, cinderblock office machine distributors, sealant makers, bottled gas works, fastener factories, warehouses, and whatever. Sunday had sent them all into silence and paralysis, all but an occasional real estate office or truck stop. Oedipa resolved to pull in at the next motel she saw, however ugly, stillness and four walls having at some point become preferable to this illusion of speed, freedom, wind in your hair, unreeling landscape -- it wasn't. What the road really was, she fancied, was this hypodermic needle, inserted somewhere

ahead into the vein of a freeway, a vein nourishing the mainliner L.A., keeping it happy, coherent, protected from pain, or whatever passes, with a city, for pain. But were Oedipa some single melted crystal of urban horse, L.A., really, would be no less turned on for her absence (p. 14).

Thus despairing over the controlled chaos of the modern culture, a chaos wherein the individual human being figures for nothing, Oedipa pulls into the Echo Courts Motel. There she is accosted by the Paranoids, by Metzger, and by the ironies of a California Eden, symbolized by the seedy display of a metal, painted nymph. Only Pynchon could ridicule -- yet maintain -- this startling notion of a completely plastic, bizarre, and distorted Eden. Here irony is in full action and the joke of an Eden of art arising from the crass core of a mindless wasteland totally incapable of aiding any aesthetic paradise looms as large as the metal nymph. One is once again reminded of Nabokov and of *Lolita*, for the metal nymph in the motel is as inadequate a symbol of Eve as is the ill-mannered and annoying child who in reality is Lolita, not at all the angel of Humbert's dreams, not even for one second. And yet the paradox, the overwhelming contradiction, is that Lolita succeeds in her role as the perfect nymphet because of "the secret of durable pigments," that is, the full lyricism of the poet's art; in much the same way Pynchon succeeds in building the ludic structure of *Lot 49* because he uses irony as a

piece of the puzzle which augments his Edenic vision precisely through contradicting it. This occurs by getting the reader to reject, boldly and completely, the author's false Eden and then subsequently forcing the reader to call back, to retract, his negation. It is a calculated chess move on the part of the author. We are caught in the artfully constructed web of his words, and by being caught we are able to see connections we might otherwise have ignored. Humour abounds and behind humour and irony lurks the machine in the garden:

Still, when she got a look at the next motel, she hesitated a second. A representation in painted sheet metal of a nymph holding a white blossom towered thirty feet into the air; the sign, lit up despite the sun, said "Echo Courts." The face of the nymph was much like Oedipa's, which didn't startle her so much as a concealed blower system that kept the nymph's gauze chiton in constant agitation, revealing enormous vermilion-tipped breasts and long pink thighs at each flap. She was smiling a lipsticked and public smile, not quite a hooker's but nowhere near that of any nymph pining away with love either. Oedipa pulled into the lot, got out and stood for a moment in the hot sun and the dead-still air, watching the artificial windstorm overhead toss gauze in five-foot excursions. Remembering her idea about a slow whirlwind, words she couldn't hear.

The room would be good enough for the time she had to stay. Its door opened on a long courtyard with a swimming pool, whose surface that day was flat, brilliant with sunlight. At the far end stood a fountain, with another nymph. Nothing moved (pp. 14-15).

Oedipa's entry into this blatantly false Eden

signals the beginning of her ludic initiation. An essential trick of the author is to arouse attention while simultaneously mocking the worthiness of such attention, like the feints of a furtive card play. Finally as joke gives way to meaning, the gaming temporarily subsides, and the reader is left to ponder ambiguities and to probe aesthetic allusions. For example, the harmonious dance of the deaf-mutes suggests obviously amusing connotations, yet when Pynchon finishes with that scene he leaves his audience with an awareness of the power of mind to create its own universe. The deaf-mutes have internalized the music they cannot hear, they have captured the melodies in their minds, and for them the harmonies are no less real. If anything, the eurhythmy increases by the mind's power to contain it; no one bumps into anyone, people are amazingly in step. Hence the original joke and silliness become a creative metaphor stretching beyond the immediate context in which they are utilized. The reader soon is initiated into this gaming ritual, and its effect is to extend meaning through ironic contrast. The deaf-mute sequence retains particular importance as a paean to the self-created achievement of the Edenic harmony and unity of art, for the deaf-mutes, unlike the confused Oedipa at this time, have attained a dialectical vision as their minds postulate the paradise of music they can never hear:

Back in the hotel she found the lobby full of deaf-mute delegates in party hats,

copied in crepe paper after the fur Chinese communist jobs made popular during the Korean conflict. They were every one of them drunk, and a few of the men grabbed her, thinking to bring her along to a party in the grand ballroom. She tried to struggle out of the silent, gesturing swarm, but was too weak. Her legs ached, her mouth tasted horrible. They swept her onto the ballroom ... Each couple on the floor danced whatever was in the fellow's head: tango, two-step, bossa nova, slop. But how long, Oedipa thought, could it go on before collisions became a serious hindrance? There would have to be collisions. The only alternative was some unthinkable order of music, many rhythms, all keys at once, a choreography in which each couple meshed easy, predestined. Something they all heard with an extra sense atrophied in herself. She followed her partner's lead, limp in the young mute's clasp, waiting for the collisions to begin. But none came. She was danced for half an hour before, by mysterious consensus, everybody took a break, without having felt any touch but the touch of her partner. Jesús Arrabal would have called it an anarchist miracle. Oedipa, with no name for it, was only demoralized. She curtsied and fled (p. 97).

Perfect harmony to inaudible music presents us with an analogy to the life of the mind, to the full range of human consciousness. The brief vision of the mental Eden comes to the reader and to Oedipa many times in the course of the novel. The motif of projecting a world is a ubiquitous one. It is not, however, a solipsistic or hermetic preoccupation because society is considered no less than the individual and his relationship to it. The whole notion of the "anarchist miracle" and of the W.A.S.T.E. system is a fundamentally social concept. Unlike Barth and the Nabokov of *Ada*, Pynchon weaves his

jokes and puns into a significantly social pattern with fairly explicit meaning. As Dickstein has noted about Pynchon's works and others from the 1960's, "In their inventiveness and plasticity these books are the fictional equivalent of utopian thinking."⁸ Harris also comments that "Pynchon's novel, in fact, is like *Catch-22* in that it is finally a radical protest novel. Built into the structure of the novel is an alternative to the present political and economic system in America ... Pynchon seems to desire a radical freedom ..."⁹ The legacy which Oedipa is left to inherit is an America without boundaries, the myth of a new world realized in the mind and through the word. The vision of the fiction brings the freedom of dancing whatever is in one's head. This is what Oedipa realizes at the end of the novel, the embrace of a virgin land, a new Eden, "as if there could be no barriers between herself and the rest of the land" (p. 133). Pynchon projects the freedom of mind as "some fraction of the truth's numinous beauty," a pure freedom which begins in the aesthetic creation and is wholly one with it, but which ultimately will encompass society and the disinherited:

What was left to inherit? That America coded
in Inverarity's testament, whose was that?
She thought of other, immobilized freight
cars, where the kids sat on the floor planking

8 Dickstein, *Gates of Eden*, p. 99.

9 Charles B. Harris, *Contemporary American Novelists of the Absurd* (New Haven, Conn.: College and University Press, 1971), p. 98.

and sang back, happy as fat, whatever came over the mother's pocket radio; of other squatters who stretched canvas for lean-tos behind smiling billboards all along the highways, or slept in junkyards in the stripped shells of wrecked Plymouths, or even, daring, spent the night up some pole in a lineman's tent like caterpillars, swung among a web of telephone wires, living in the very copper rigging and secular miracle of communication, untroubled by the dumb voltages flickering their miles, the night long, in the thousands of unheard messages. She remembered drifters she had listened to, Americans speaking their language carefully, scholarly, as if they were in exile from somewhere else invisible yet congruent with the cheered land she lived in; and walkers along the roads at night, zooming in and out of your headlights without looking up, too far from any town to have a real destination. And the voices before and after the dead man's that had phoned at random during the darkest, slowest hours, searching ceaseless among the dial's ten million possibilities for that magical Other who would reveal herself out of the roar of relays, monotone litanies of insult, filth, fantasy, love whose brute repetition must someday call into being the trigger for the unnamable act, the recognition, the Word (pp. 135-6).

Hence the game for Pynchon serves the meaning of the word. The two are joined so closely, however, as to be inseparable. While the game and the play of the novel seemingly move freely, the author maintains as tight and disciplined a control over form as did the masters of the great nineteenth-century realist novel. The ironic comedy and its black humour belie the pattern and order secured by the aesthetic magus. The play is not random and it never leaves the watchful eye of its creator. Pynchon eliminates anarchy and entropy from his verbal Eden. *The Crying of Lot 49* surveys the ludic realm as

it works against absurdity and meaninglessness. Harris is wrong when he posits *Lot 49* as an absurdist novel, and he himself is bound to acknowledge as much when he admits that this fiction "seems to protest absurdity rather than present it".¹⁰ Pynchon's paradise of words turns absurdity and entropy against themselves. Ultimately there is no absurdity in the chorus of Pynchon's carefully articulated symbols. As Slade has commented:

Structurally, Pynchon's second novel is his finest, written as if to answer critics who charged *V.* with formlessness. *The Crying of Lot 49* is a tightly plotted, symmetrical narrative of great compactness, enhanced by the author's light tone and feeling for American popular culture. His attention to symmetry, Alfred Kazin has said, sets Pynchon above most "absurdist". To call Pynchon an absurdist is to misconstrue him, particularly with reference to a book so carefully predicated on logic.¹¹

If the author is a transcendent magus -- and Pynchon surely fills this role in all his novels -- nonetheless his games are highly structured ones designed to probe meaning, not to float unattended into the air. This awareness brings the almost vaudevillian playfulness of the first encounter between Oedipa and Metzger into perspective. A tyro in the world of artifice and literary games, despite having had a magus-like lover,

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹¹ Joseph W. Slade, *Thomas Pynchon* (New York: Warner, 1974), p. 125.

a bathetic role-playing husband, and a cleverly manipulative psychiatrist, Oedipa learns the rules of the game swiftly. Moreover, as her continuing quest for the Tristero demonstrates, she cannot settle for play without poetry or meaning. Like Van and Ada of the eponymous novel, like Ambrose in "Lost in the Funhouse," Oedipa must learn the tricks of play and the manoeuvres of the game before the paradisiac garden can be revealed from the dank marshes of frivolity. She has to become something of a magus-manipulator herself to transform ordinary play into aesthetic play.

Upon meeting Metzger, Oedipa is onto his line, his customary tricks of virile persuasiveness. A veritable Adam standing near the fountain of this plastic California Eden, Metzger opens his relationship with Oedipa on a first move, as if on an imaginary chess board. At the door of her motel room, Metzger laments the exploitative ruin of his childhood as an actor. Oedipa is almost but not quite trapped in Metzger's putatively sad, sympathetic cry. But she stops herself in time, and instead responds to the game being played: "'And how often,' Oedipa inquired, now aware it was all words, 'has that line of approach worked for you, Baby Igor?'" (p. 17) With this dismissal of his original game stroke, Oedipa turns her attention to the movie on television, but what appears on the screen is not relief from the game

but a continuation of it through the old film in which Metzger stars as Baby Igor. The game, which Oedipa suspects is one of seduction, keeps on going, and by implication it becomes more allusively aesthetic as it encompasses the story and songs of the movie *Cashiered*.

Even in its paltriness, *Cashiered* represents the endless anfractuositities of art, although it is only sentimental rubbish. The movie itself stands as a symbol of a fictional Eden. In the midst of his artful metaphors, Pynchon of course maintains irony and laughter and the scene is one of high comedy, with Oedipa and Metzger playing off each other. Squeezed carefully among silliness and jokes, however, is the covert metaphor of Eden. That Oedipa can posit so many alternative interpretations of character and action for the film *Cashiered* and that a thirty-year-old movie can still excite the viewer, mean that the imaginative paradise of art is endlessly renewable. Once engendered, fiction lives in the mind forever. Metzger articulates the endless possibilities of art, its ambiguities, and finally its eternal quality as a preserved vision. The movie is Edenic because it is free from entropy, light never fades it, time cannot erase its power and multiplicity of meaning:

"But our beauty lies," explained Metzger, "in this extended capacity for convolution. A lawyer in a courtroom, in front of any

jury, becomes an actor, right? Raymond Burr is an actor, impersonating a lawyer, who in front of a jury becomes an actor. Me, I'm a former actor who became a lawyer. They've done the pilot film of a TV series, in fact, based loosely on my career, starring my friend Manny Di Presso, a one-time lawyer who quit his firm to become an actor. Who in this pilot plays me, an actor become a lawyer reverting periodically to being an actor. The film is in an air-conditioned vault at one of the Hollywood studios, light can't fatigue it, it can be repeated endlessly" (p. 20).

Almost slyly, tucked away in a clever spiel, Pynchon has made his Nabokovian bid for the eternizing commitment of art. The false chimera of value in sentimental Hollywood child movies, despite its hard irony, paradoxically establishes a pattern for the fictive art in this novel. As she partakes in the story of Baby Igor, Oedipa, too, is reluctantly drawn into the plot, ostensibly predictable as it is. She has a desire to grasp the ludic challenge which Metzger offers her. Without much deliberation, she bets on the outcome of the film and enters into the game of sexual chase as well. She loses time absorbed in the Eden of play: "She looked at her watch, but it had stopped" (p. 20). The aesthetic garden may here be a seedy motel room and the art object not worthy of the name, yet the value of the paradise of mind created by the act of this fiction is such that Pynchon's *bête noire* of entropy is negated in temporary triumph. The players are free from time and its destructiveness.

The nemesis of postlapsarian man is this inevitable

destruction, represented by entropy. In Oedipa's motel room this concept attains active presence by means of an explosive can of hair spray: "The can hit the floor, something broke, and with a great outsurge of pressure the stuff commenced atomizing, propelling the can swiftly about the bathroom" (p. 23). Metzger and Oedipa duck and hide, scrambling close to the floor as the menace careens around them. Yet when the can stops flying and things quiet down, what remains after the potentially destructive scene are the durable pigments of art, even if here ironically taken in the form of a third-rate adventure film. This statement is ironically underscored by the awe-struck admiration of the Paranoids rock group and their teenage confreres, who view Oedipa's games with unalloyed attention and keen responsiveness. Throughout the fiction it is the Eden of play which fortifies the characters against the surge of entropy. This is the role of the search for the Tristero and the W.A.S.T.E. system.

As Olderman adumbrates in an otherwise unenlightening study, "Tristero compels her to seek her own deliverance; it leads her to understand the range of her alternatives ..." ¹² In the passage from *Lot 49* considered here, it is the Eden of play, the

¹² Raymond M. Olderman, *Beyond the Waste Land: The American Novel in the Nineteen-Sixties* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 146.

agonistic game with Metzger, to which the heroine Oedipa Maas returns in refuge against the tyranny of entropy. The fictional paradise generates "some state of minimum grace," and what the narrator of *Gravity's Rainbow* delineates for Slothrop also has meaning for Oedipa and all players in the verbal garden, readers included: "... that by riding each branch the proper distance, knowing when to transfer, keeping some state of minimum grace though it might often look like he's headed the wrong way, this network of all plots may yet carry him to freedom" (GR, p. 603).

Entropy is overcome -- at the very least temporarily held back -- by absorption in the ludic gambit. This is, foremost, the method of Pierce Inverarity, the one he used while alive and the course to which he subjects Oedipa and others after his demise. Inverarity is a quintessential magus-figure, very much like Conchis in *The Magus*. He controls characters through the prolific manifestation of compulsive games and puzzles, through the construction of the labyrinth. The first fairly eerie and sufficiently weird event occurs when Pierce, Oedipa's former lover, telephones her in the middle of the night and does Lamont Cranston imitations. Oedipa is surprised by the quiet ambiguity of Pierce's manoeuvre at the time (p. 3). Later she reflects on the event as if it were one of the cards in "a conjurer's deck" (p. 2). This early move establishes a key pattern for the play

to follow, one which Oedipa, Metzger, and all those connected with the Tristero and the Wharfinger drama are bound to be engaged in. Even before Oedipa consents to be a player, the ineluctable game has begun, and at once she is fully entranced by the ludic quest. She finds it is a quest which somehow defies the entropy of Pierce's death and which ordains power, almost from the grave:

Oedipa had been named also to execute the will in a codicil dated a year ago. She tried to think back to whether anything unusual had happened around then. Through the rest of the afternoon, through her trip to the market in downtown Kinneret-Among-The-Pines to buy ricotta and listen to the Muzak (today she came through the bead-curtained entrance around bar 4 of the Fort Wayne Settecento Ensemble's variorum recording of the Vivaldi Kazoo Concerto, Boyd Beaver, soloist); then through the sunned gathering of her marjoram and sweet basil from the hero garden, reading of book reviews in the latest *Scientific American*, into the layering of a lasagna, garlicking of a bread, tearing up of romaine leaves, eventually, oven on, into the mixing of the twilight's whiskey sours against the arrival of her husband, Wendell ("Mucho") Maas from work, she wondered, wondered, shuffling back through a fat deckful of days which seemed (wouldn't she be first to admit it?) more or less identical, or all pointing the same way subtly like a conjurer's deck, any odd one readily clear to a trained eye (p. 2).

If we stop here in this long excerpt, we can observe several interesting motifs and nuances, which become more audible and obvious as the novel continues. Already on page two the heroine is involved in the first stage of what promises to be an elaborate,

sinuous game. She is caught in the trap, already in a defensive position, yet still grasping for clues as to what her position should be, why she should have one at all. A trick of Pynchon's ludic paradise revolves around obtaining commitment for the game before the player or reader knows the nature of the game. One is inevitably pulled inward before he gets a chance to look down at his own hand, let alone to guess what is hidden in anyone else's. In the herb garden of marjoram and sweet basil, Oedipa creates a fantasy world and the mild inkling of a mental paradise replete with ideas such as those "in the latest *Scientific American*." There is song, the sun shines, and most of all, there is the game. Pynchon's joking tone conditions the reader to expect slyness and tricks, such as when the narrator tells us that Oedipa went shopping to listen to what all readers realize are the grating sounds of Muzak. The irony continues as one reads the inanity of "the Fort Wayne Settecento Ensemble's variorum recording of the Vivaldi Kazoo Concerto, Boyd Beaver, soloist". The phrases "deckful of days" and "a conjurer's deck" further thrust forward both Inverarity's and Pynchon's magician-like roles. As Pynchon's Doppelgänger or playful shadow, Pierce represents the writer as magus; and of course, his performing the Lamont Cranston imitation, Lamont Cranston having played "The Shadow" on U.S. radio for many years, serves to verify this point.

Pierce plays with words and toys with roles and ideas in a way typifying that of the novelist. As the above quotation continues, so also does the ludic interaction:

It took her till the middle of Huntley and Brinkley to remember that last year at three or so one morning there had come this long-distance call, from where she would never know (unless now he'd left a diary) by a voice beginning in heavy Slavic tones as second secretary at the Transylvanian Consulate, looking for an escaped bat; modulated to comic-Negro, then on into hostile Pachuco dialect, full of chingas and maricones; then a Gestapo officer asking her in shrieks did she have relatives in Germany and finally his Lamont Cranston voice, the one he'd talked in all the way down to Mazatlán, "Pierce, please," she'd managed to get in, "I thought we had ----"

"But Margo," earnestly, "I've just come from Commissioner Weston, and that old man in the fun house was murdered by the same blowgun that killed Professor Quackenbush," or something.

"For God's sake," she said. Mucho had rolled over and was looking at her.

"Why don't you hang up on him," Mucho suggested, sensibly.

"I heard that," Pierce said. "I think it's time Wendell Maas had a little visit from The Shadow." Silence, positive and thorough, fell. So it was the last of his voices she ever heard. Lamont Cranston. That phone line could have pointed any direction, been any length (pp. 2-3)

Indeed, play and fantasy dominate the opening of *Lot 49*. Obvious manipulation enters the scene; the magus plays, perhaps, with an unfair advantage. After all, the author, like Pierce, does control everything. As a manifestation of this godlike creative power, the

character of Dr. Hilarius offers some insights.

Hilarius makes faces and this face-making technique reminds one of the smiling face in *The Magus*, the ancient smile on a sun god which articulates primal freedom. Hilarius becomes destructively entangled in role-playing and paranoid fears. At the beginning of the novel, however, he echoes a certain ironic playfulness utilized by Fynchon to act against entropy. He significantly reminds Oedipa of Pierce doing an imitation of "a Gestapo officer," and the figure of a psychiatrist gives free rein to the author's satire on the fraudulence of that profession. The scene of Dr. Hilarius's 3 A.M. telephone call renders a very amusing temporary smile of freedom on a situation of otherwise potential *angst*.

The freedom of aesthetic play is that which the attorney Roseman tries to attain through his own literary endeavour, his running game of fantasy with the writers of the Perry Mason television show. Since his job and his innate talents cannot yield the glamour and success of Perry Mason, Roseman conducts a continuous exchange in his mind and on paper, wherein his creative powers triumph over those of the television hero. Fiction for him is a tool of Edenic fulfillment. Roseman, too, has only words to play with, and it is words which convey him to the threshold of freedom, or what in his life comes closest to its attainment. Words and

fictions offer the "endless repetitions" of primal bliss otherwise unobtainable in the cosmic rush toward entropy.

The direction of a new paradise leads to an erotic Eden, a sexual garden of delights, sensual hedonism as well as verbal pleasure. We have already adumbrated how Nabokov uses sexual emancipation and uninhibitedness to clarify the Edenic possibilities of his art; the passion of lovers comes to symbolize the author's love affair with language. Pynchon, while applying an irony perhaps more pervasive than Nabokov's, seeks also to postulate fictional freedom through sexual play. This pattern can be entropic, as it is for Mucho Maas and for Tyrone Slothrop in *Gravity's Rainbow*, but for Oedipa as for Roger Mexico, it presents a fascinating search for freedom and for a sense of self. Hegel has called this the "concrete concept of freedom," and noted that "Freedom in this sense, however, we already possess in the form of feeling -- in friendship and love, for instance. Here we are not inherently one-sided; we restrict ourselves gladly in relating ourselves to another, but in this restriction know ourselves as ourselves."¹³

¹³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952, reprinted, 1976), p. 228.

The polymorphous perversity of human sexuality symbolizes for Pynchon nothing if not the multifarious variations of the mind's creative potential. As Marcuse has explained with reference to the *Symposium*, pleasure in a beautiful body leads logically to pleasure in a beautiful mind: "Out of this truly polymorphous sexuality arises the desire for that which animates the desired body: the psyche and its various manifestations. There is an unbroken ascent in erotic fulfillment from the corporeal love of one to that of the others, to the love of beautiful work and play ..., and ultimately to the love of beautiful knowledge ..." ¹⁴ Thus Oedipa's layering of her clothes in the game of seduction with Metzger may be seen to represent the endless ambiguities of words and the self's creative power. Her clothes are like a fictional Joseph's coat of a thousand luminous colours. The more that is stripped away, the more remains. The mind of the artist and of man in general is constantly self-generating. The labyrinth is also involved, for uncovering meaning is an endless task in the moves of a game. The ludic process itself is the solution:

Oedipa then sat five minutes watching the tube, forgetting she was supposed to ask questions. Metzger took his trousers off, earnestly. The father seemed to be up before a court-martial, now.

"So," she said, "an early reel. This is where he gets cashiered, ha, ha."

14 Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (New York: Vintage, 1962), pp. 192-3.

"Maybe it's a flashback," Metzger said. "Or maybe he gets it twice." Oedipa removed a bracelet. So it went: the succession of film fragments on the tube, the progressive removal of clothing that seemed to bring her no nearer nudity, the boozing, the tireless shivaree of voices and guitars from out by the pool. Now and then a commercial would come in, each time Metzger would say, "Inverarity's," or "Big block of shares," and later settled for nodding and smiling. Oedipa would scowl back, growing more and more certain, while a headache began to flower behind her eyes, that they among all possible combinations of new lovers had found a way to make time itself slow down (pp. 25-6).

Sexuality provides a key nexus in the fiction, in the main story and in the dramatic subplot. Not only is the scene at Echo Courts one of overt and sometimes kinky sexual behaviour, but everywhere Oedipa goes in her tortuous search, she encounters new, different, and often strange sexual games, and these sexual happenings tend to connect with the mysterious Tristero. As Oedipa receives a newsless letter from her estranged husband, she is forced to reflect on the form of the missive not its contents. Mucho carefully does not detail any of his Humbert-Humbert-like sexual behaviour, so the message in the letter is a bit of a sham, but on the outside of the envelope Oedipa notices a misprint in the cancellation stamp -- "REPORT ALL OBSCENE MAIL TO YOUR POTSMASER" (p. 30). Having then to desert the Echo Courts due to the voyeurism of Miles and his group, Oedipa goes with Metzger to a local bar called "The Scope". There a fellow named Fallopian inadvertently

introduces them to the private postal service. Moreover, it is at the pub that Oedipa first sees the W.A.S.T.E. symbol, the muted postal horn, which hides among graffiti and "lipsticked obscenities" in the ladies' washroom. Again the innuendo and terms of reference are sexual -- "'Interested in sophisticated fun? You, hubby, girl friends. The more the merrier. Get in touch with Kirby, through WASTE only, Box 7391, L.A.'" (p. 34)

Because the restrictions of sexuality in society reflect a panoply of limitations, indeed because they mirror the discontents of a civilization, even the freedom of sexual language carries one closer to the aesthetic Eden. Sexual metaphors and erotic signs become omnipresent as Oedipa's ludic initiation commences in earnest. The literary quest becomes almost as poignant and as central as the search for a lost lover or a prelapsarian world. The world is all before Oedipa if only she can learn to create it:

So began, for Oedipa, the languid, sinister blooming of The Tristero. Or rather, her attendance at some unique performance, prolonged as if it were the last of the night, something a little extra for whoever'd stayed this late. As if the breakaway gowns, net bras, jeweled garters and G-strings of historical figuration that would fall away were layered dense as Oedipa's own streetclothes in that game with Metzger in front of the Baby Igor movie; as if a plunge toward dawn indefinite black hours long would indeed be necessary before The Tristero could be revealed in its terrible nakedness. Would its smile, then, be coy, and would it flirt away harmlessly backstage, say good night

with a Bourbon Street bow and leave her in peace? Or would it instead, the dance ended, come back down the runway, its luminous stare locked to Oedipa's smile, gone malign and pitiless; bend to her alone among the desolate rows of seats and begin to speak words she never wanted to hear? (p. 36)

The entire game of *The Tristero* is a systematic plunge into the maze of elaborate and involved connections, from sixteenth-century Europe to contemporary California, from Jacobean revenge drama to ludic fiction in one fell swoop. To find or to make connections is for Pynchon to deny entropy and in the negative pattern of his art, to nullify entropy means an attainment of prelapsarian bliss and constancy. The very game of positing and forging connections, then, is *ipso facto* evidence of establishing the terrain of Edenic literature. The connections may not reveal answers. Kazin argues that "In Thomas Pynchon's *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49* the protagonist is History itself -- History as a mystification, perhaps deliberate! that operates as a whirligig".¹⁵ The puzzle entices precisely because it offers this mystifying engagement, not final solutions. The verbal Eden stands as Pynchon's formulation of the relationship with nature and society that Emerson had first posited for the new world of America. What the purveyors of the Thurn and Taxis brought to the virgin continent hence comes to mean the transcendent epistemology of idealism, a self-generating life of the mind Beyond

¹⁵ Alfred Kazin, *Bright Book of Life: American Novelists and Storytellers from Hemingway to Mailer* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1974), p. 275.

entropy. Art is the Maxwell's Demon, and the man who plays is the inventor of a new territory. As Driblette avers:

"You know where that play exists, not in that file cabinet, not in any paperback you're looking for, but --" a hand emerged from the veil of shower-steam to indicate his suspended head -- "in here. That's what I'm for. To give the spirit flesh. The words, who cares? They're rote noises to hold line bashes with, to get past the bone barriers around an actor's memory, right? But the reality is in *this* head. Mine. I'm the projector at the planetarium, all the closed little universe visible in the circle of that stage is coming out of my mouth, eyes, sometimes other orifices also" (p. 56).

Indeed, for Pynchon each reader is "the projector at the planetarium," each individual follows the keynote of the author as he creates, in words but more essentially through ideas, himself and his world. As mentioned in Chapter One, Hegel tells us, "The universal need for art ... is man's rational need to lift the inner and outer world into his spiritual consciousness as an object in which he recognizes again his own self".¹⁶ As Hegel adds in his *Logic*, analysis turns the concrete into the abstract, that "once more we see ... that the truth of things lies in thought".¹⁷ To play in art is freely to pattern one's consciousness and for Pynchon the essential thing is to play.

16 G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), Volume I, pp. 31-2.

17 G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Logic, Being Part One of the Encyclopaedia of The Philosophical Sciences* (1830) trans. William Wallace, foreword by J.N. Findlay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975; rpt. 1978), p. 63.

Thus does the author mock interpretation. Like the classical magician, once he knows we are onto a trick, he changes the game. Hence we have the explanation for Oedipa's and often the reader's frustration at trying to unravel a permanently and purposively tied-up ball of string. When ripped apart, the pieces of string do not connect, they cease to exist. The playwright Driblette may be speaking for the author when he asseverates the following to Oedipa after the performance of *The Courier's Tragedy*:

"The only residue in fact would be things Wharfinger didn't lie about. Perhaps Squamuglia and Faggio, if they ever existed. Perhaps the Thurn and Taxis mail system. Stamp collectors tell me it did exist. Perhaps the other, also. The Adversary. But they would be traces, fossils. Dead, mineral, without value or potential.

"You could fall in love with me, you can talk to my shrink, you can hide a tape recorder in my bedroom, see what I talk about from wherever I am when I sleep. You want to do that? You can put together clues, develop a thesis, or several, about why characters reacted to the Trystero possibility the way they did, why the assassins came on, why the black costumes. You could waste your life that way and never touched [sic] the truth.... I gave them life. That's it." He fell silent. The shower splashed (p. 56).

There is an obvious gratuity to much of Pynchon's magus-like behaviour, and this overindulgence in fun and games for their own sake destroys part of the very real achievement of the author's Eden of words. It trivializes. For instance, puns and wisecracks abound and it often seems as if Pynchon is drafting a comedy

routine rather than a work of fiction. It is hard to take entropy as a serious concern when it is followed by a quick joke. The real sufferings and conflicts are diminished by the lampoons of the writer. Fragmentation and incongruence may occur as situations appear more laughable than cogent. Imbued with puns on Station "KCUF" ("fuck" spelled backwards), on Genghis Cohen, on men named "Koteks" and "Fallopian", can the story of Oedipa's quest be taken any more seriously than the newspaper comics? Humour undermines *angst* and tension, and even humour itself, such as in the nose-picking contest described on page thirty-one, often does not go very far. Moreover, Pynchon's parodies are the author's self-gratifying constructs; they appear intended to generate little response from the reader, who may feel he is intruding on a private joke. A severe and trenchant critic has argued:

Even his parodies are often contrivances. They are not reductive because they draw upon material that is usually self-parodying. They are not close enough to the works they mimic to be analytical, and they do not, as Joyce's parodies do, show us the relation of literary language to its content. Nor, despite Pynchon's closeness to Nabokov, do they succeed in shutting us off from the comfortable referents to experience that we bring to the reading of a book, thus compelling us, as Nabokov does so often, to respond simply to the artifice, to build up a series of emotional and critical relationships to something that we know is involuted and unrealistic -- to force us into relativism. Pynchon pulls in and out of parody and half-hearted realism too often to achieve the polished surface of Nabokov's best novels; Pynchon('s) parodies seem to be there largely to satisfy the novelist's

pleasure in constructing them. They are usually simply elaborate amusements.¹⁸

One finds that the elaborate search for the meaning of a Jacobean revenge drama, the hunt for connections between the Thurn and Taxis mail system and W.A.S.T.E., the layering of parody upon parody, exhaust themselves and die in a sort of solipsistic strangulation long before the fiction ends. Oedipa seems to mirror the silliness of the reader in her hardy perseverance. The quest is one of nullity. This is the most serious and problematic charge against Pynchon's art. His irony denies meaning rather than augmenting it, just as his manipulation of the audience often discourages interest instead of increasing it through conflict and tension. As Leverenz has noted about a similar though more complex quandary facing the reader of *Gravity's Rainbow*: "The book was an act of calculated hostility against my own need to find out what it was about. In fact, *that* was what it was about. Anything organized, including narrative or interpretation, signified co-optation by waste-making forces. Abandon all systems, ye Bliceros who enter here, and joyfully accept the anarchic redemptive rainbow of waste, death, and poor

¹⁸ Roger B. Henkle, "Pynchon's Tapestries on the Western Wall," in *Pynchon*, ed. by Edward Mendelson (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1978), p. 111.

preterite anonymity."¹⁹ Leverenz has established the anger of the reader who feels he has been toyed with. How does one exculpate the author for these excesses, for his gratuitous manipulation of our attention? Does one? Is the fiction an aimless chase leading up a dead-end road painted in California psychedelic, with signs pointing nowhere?

To answer this, one first must state that Pynchon clearly knows the manner of his prose fully lends itself to such criticism, and he plunges ahead in the face of it. His method ineluctably contains his aim. His satiric mode reflects the mind of his time; his biting social critique and nightmare vision are no less real and frightening for the comedic digressions in them. The plight of a sorely fragmented society is perhaps best illustrated by tangential fragmentations in an otherwise controlled verbal structure. The calm, uninterrupted flow of smooth narration will not suffice when entropy is lurking at the back door and nuclear fission at the front. Without contradiction there can be no progress, and Pynchon artfully patterns his ludic world with such ironic reversals as postlapsarian man is bound to encounter. This continual conflict shows

19. David Leverenz, "On Trying to Read *Gravity's Rainbow*," in *Mindful Pleasures: Essays on Thomas Pynchon*, ed. by George Levine and David Leverenz (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976), pp. 230-1.

the urgency of the life of the mind as the play of words and power of self-creation contradict the omnipresence of entropy. The humanity of the ludic epistemology is the progress which Pynchon offers. As Hegel explains about the life of the mind in the *Logic*:

Seeing that there is in it no transition, or presupposition, and in general no specific character other than what is fluid and transparent, the Absolute Idea is for itself the pure form of the notion, which contemplates its contents as its own self. It is its own content, in so far as it ideally distinguishes itself from itself, and the one of the two things distinguished is a self-identity in which however is contained the totality of the form as the system of terms describing its content ...

To speak of the absolute idea may suggest the conception that we are at length reaching the right thing and the sum of the whole matter ... The interest lies in the whole movement. When a man traces up the steps of his life, the end may appear to him very restricted: but in it the whole *decursus vitae* is comprehended. So, too, the content of the absolute idea is the whole breadth of ground which has passed under our view up to this point. Last of all comes the discovery that the whole evolution is what constitutes the content and the interest ...²⁰

The reader is not forgotten in Pynchon's solipsism; the reader is the essential player, and he, too, becomes a creative Adam through the strength of the fiction to absorb him and even to frustrate him. The solo harmonious orchestration belongs to Pynchon, but the

20 Hegel, *Logic*, pp. 292-3.

music is for our ears. This is how Oedipa sees Pierce; this is the function of the magus. Pynchon knows the pitfalls of his medium. Finally, his sensitivity to this endemic problem of ludic fiction engages the reader rather than alienating him because always the tricks are played for the reader, not against him. Like the broad universe it is, Pynchon's fiction can contain our objections and then he can negate them with the skill of the smiling magus. What this fiction, like all fictions, comes down to is words and a creator. As Oedipa sees it near the book's conclusion, the ludic encounter with words brings the "secret richness and concealed density of dream," even if its power may plunge one toward the abyss of pain or the paradise of mind. Indeed, "a plot has been mounted" against all of us who read novels:

It's unavoidable, isn't it? Every access route to the Tristero can be traced also back to the Inverarity estate ...

Meaning what? That Bortz, along with Metzger, Cohen, Driblette, Koteks, the tattooed sailor in San Francisco, the W.A.S.T.E. carriers she'd seen -- that all of them were Pierce Inverarity's men? Bought? Or loyal, for free, for fun, to some grandiose practical joke he'd cooked up, all for her embarrassment, or terrorizing, or moral improvement?

Change you name to Miles, Dean, Serge, and/or Leonard, baby, she advised her reflection in the half-light of that afternoon's vanity mirror. Either way, they'll call it paranoia. They. Either you have stumbled indeed, without the aid of LSD or other indole alkaloids, onto a

richness and concealed density of dream; onto a network by which X number of Americans are truly communicating whilst reserving their lies, recitations of routine, arid betrayals of spiritual poverty, for the official government delivery system; maybe even onto a real alternative to the exitlessness, to the absence of surprise to life, that harrows the head of everybody American you know, and you too, sweetie. Or you are hallucinating it. Or a plot has been mounted against you, so expensive and elaborate, involving items like the forging of stamps and ancient books ... in a way either too secret or too involved ... so labyrinthine that it must have meaning beyond just a practical joke. Or you are fantasying some such plot, in which case you are a nut, Oedipa, out of your skull (pp. 127-8).

We may take this passage to be Pynchon's own reply, albeit only a partial reply, to our debate. This is the defense offered by the author for his flaunting of literary convenances. Indeed, as we have said, the ludic aesthetic does present the game as a metaphor for the "secret richness and concealed density of dream," of a lost prelapsarian world as it also projects to the reader "a plot (which literally) has been mounted against you" (p. 128). The plot of fiction is against one insofar as it presents a move like a chess move, which demands a response and perhaps a counter-response from the reader. And the Edenic art of the contemporary novel is explicitly "so labyrinthine that it must have meaning beyond just a practical joke" (p. 128). The Eden of words is primarily the contradictory protest-escape by which the aesthetic universe forms an authentic new world of mind as "a real alternative to

the exitlessness, to the absence of surprise to life that harrows the head of everybody American you know" (p. 128).

For Nabokov, for Barth, for Coover, for Pynchon, fiction offers the only real alternative to the emptiness of a barren continent, a civilization which never fulfilled its first bright promise, for American fiction gives Europe the new Eden its geography never could yield. This essence of freedom in the play of mind does for the individual reader what Oedipa's search does for her; it reveals one's true humanity as one abandons time, space, and mundane reality for the aesthetic game. By means of the fictional process, we re-enter the primal garden and there we mould a dialectic borne of the child's wisdom and the energy of the gods. Oedipa's dreamlike encounter with the circle of children in Golden Gate Park poignantly delineates the nature of the verbal Eden, the primordial paradise brought to vital memory through art. Again, the motif parallels Nabokov's image of the concord of children at play in *Lolita*:

At some indefinite passage in night's sonorous score, it also came to her that she would be safe, that something, perhaps only her linearly fading drunkenness, would protect her. The city was hers, as, made up and sleeked so with the customary words and images ... it had not been before: she had safe-passage tonight ... The repetition of symbols was to be enough, without trauma as well perhaps to attenuate it or even jar it altogether loose from her memory. She was meant to remember. She faced that

possibility as she might the toy street from a high balcony, roller-coaster ride, feeding-time among the beasts in a zoo -- any death-wish that can be consummated by some minimum gesture. She touched the edge of its voluptuous field ... She tested it, shivering: I am meant to remember. Each clue that comes is *supposed* to have its own clarity, its fine chances for permanence. But then she wondered if the gemlike "clues" were only some kind of compensation. To make up for her having lost the direct, epileptic Word, the cry that might abolish the night.

In Golden Gate Park she came on a circle of children in their nightclothes, who told her they were dreaming the gathering. But that the dream was really no different from being awake, because in the mornings when they got up they felt tired, as if they'd been up most of the night. When their mothers thought they were out playing they were really curled in cupboards of neighbors' houses, in platforms up in trees, in secretly-hollowed nests inside hedges, sleeping, making up for these hours. The night was empty of all terror for them, they had inside their circle an imaginary fire, and needed nothing but their own unpenetrated sense of community (pp. 86-7).

The important strength of *Lot 49* is that it takes Schiller's dictum-- "Man is only fully a human being when he plays"²¹ -- further than do the other novelists in this study. It is necessary to remember that Schiller himself and Hegel as well talk about nothing but man in society. For them man is the unity of the individual and the social world. As Wilkinson and Willoughby elucidate for us: "And when at the end we come to Schiller's vision of an Aesthetic State we find there

21 Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: In a Series of Letters*, ed. by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson et al (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 107.

no select company of aesthetes lost in idle contemplation of music and statuary ... but a community of people ... going about their ordinary affairs -- but with a different quality in their attitude both to the job in hand and to each other".²² The notion of the hermetic artist would merit instant rejection and this marks Pynchon's standpoint as well. Oedipa is fully human because she is attempting to play in society, not in the isolation of an enclosed tower. She resembles Schiller's ideal man: "Once he does begin to enjoy through the eye, and seeing acquires for him a value of its own, he is already aesthetically free and the play-drive has started to develop".²³ Oedipa grows in humanity as she plays, as she forges a fictive Eden and moves toward the aesthetic ideal.

If the genre of ludic fiction possesses one outstanding weakness, aside from its easy potential to decline into amusing trivia, it is the paucity of character delineation. One thinks especially of Barth, the later Nabokov, and Pynchon in *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, where some characters are one-dimensional symbols or two-dimensional props, and project no individuality and exiguous humanity. Characters in ludic fiction often have all the life of mechanical

22 Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby, "Introduction," in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man, In a Series of Letters*, by Friedrich Schiller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. xi.

23 Schiller, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

chess pieces moved heavily by the authorial magus. Several of the minor characters in *Lot 49* share this trait, yet the figure of Oedipa herself does not partake of such limitations, and it is her singular questing presence which dominates the work. Oedipa may begin as a fairly self-centred housewife and a "Young Republican" as well, but Pynchon carefully adumbrates and emphasizes those qualities which prepare her for the game, and which, following Schiller's context, insure her humanity. Oedipa is endowed with the magnanimity and kindness of a Cordelia; most of all, she possesses that heroine's capacity for love. On page three the reader gets an inkling of Oedipa's nature. She has just received the startling news that her former lover had died and named her the executrix of his estate. She waits for her husband Mucho to return home from the radio station and longs to unburden herself to him. She wants solace but instead she gives it:

She felt exposed, finessed, put down. She had never executed a will in her life, didn't know where to begin, didn't know how to tell the law firm in L.A. that she didn't know where to begin.

"Mucho, baby," she cried in an access of helplessness.

Mucho Maas, home, bounded through the screen door. "Today was another defeat," he began.

"Let me tell you," she also began. But let Mucho go first.

He was a disc jockey who worked further along the Peninsula and suffered regular crises of conscience about his profession. "I don't believe in any of it, Oed," he could usually get out. "I try, I truly can't," way down there, further down perhaps than she could reach, so that such times often brought her near panic. It might have been the sight of her so about to lose control that seemed to bring him back up (pp. 3-4).

In the middle of a self-absorbed narcissistic culture, Oedipa surfaces as an Eve of brightness, as a redemptress. She herself, as a symbol of the Edenic possibilities of fiction, becomes the sort of anarchist miracle which Jesús Arrabal foresees as a revolutionary redemptive force. Oedipa's unmitigated empathy and her relentless humanity act as a powerful counterbalance to the all-consuming entropy which Pynchon projects. Oedipa's tender humanity expands in direct ratio to her involvement in the ludic tension of the fictive quest. The author exposes these positive qualities, this generosity of spirit, as the attributes of a human growth which parallels, as Schiller has written, the aesthetic commitment. One learns of Oedipa's forgiveness of Mucho's embarrassing and hurtful infidelities with adolescent girls, of her absorption with his *angst*. As Slade points out, "She had mentioned Mucho's proclivities to him once, but softened by the tenderness with which she accepts his obsessions and which is her dominant characteristic, she decided not to reproach him again".²⁴ Oedipa's capacity for love

24 Slade, *Thomas Pynchon*, p. 155.

and understanding merits notable delineation from Pynchon. He concentrates on her compassion for the sorrows of a postlapsarian people, for the preterite of contemporary America, the sick, the poor, the helpless, and the lonely. Levine comments about Pynchon that "we ignore too ... his most astonishing and overwhelming power, to imagine love out of the wastes of a world full of people helpless to love".²⁵ Oedipa encapsulates this capacity for love which transcends entropy. The most explicit scene, and perhaps the most moving and compelling, is the protagonist's meeting with the dying sailor and her union with him -- the author's pietà. We may recall that this scene is a direct result of the Edenic quest, of Oedipa's play, and it recognizes the achievement of her humanity, a triumph over entropy, and the force of love:

"Give me a cigarette, Ramírez," the sailor said. "I know you got one."

Would it be today? "Ramírez," she cried. The arthritic looked around on his rusty neck. "He's going to die," she said.

"Who isn't?" said Ramírez.

She remembered John Nefastis, talking about his Machine, and massive destructions of information. So when this mattress flared up around the sailor, in his Viking's funeral; the stored, coded years of uselessness, early death, self-harrowing, the sure decay of hope, the set of all men who had slept on it, whatever their lives had been, would truly cease to be, forever, when the mattress burned. She stared at it in wonder. It was as if she had just discovered the irreversible process. It astonished her to think that so much could be lost, even the quantity of hallucination

25 George Levine, "Risking the Moment", p. 118.

belonging just to the sailor that the world would bear no further trace of. She knew, because she had held him, that he suffered DT's. Behind the initials was a metaphor, a delirium tremens, a trembling unfurrowing of the mind's plowshare. The saint whose water can light lamps, the clairvoyant whose lapse in recall is the breath of God, the true paranoid for whom all is organized in spheres joyful or threatening about the central pulse of himself, the dreamer whose puns probe ancient fetid shafts and tunnels of truth all act in the same special relevance to the word, or whatever it is the word is there, buffering, to protect us from. The act of metaphor then was a thrust at truth and a lie, depending where you were: inside, safe, or outside, lost (p. 95).

The word exists to buffer and to protect man from the sorrowful plight of an entropic universe. Through Oedipa, Pynchon embraces the verbal paradise as the appropriate, perhaps the only, human response against entropy. The dying sailor has some connection to the W.A.S.T.E. system; through it he hopes to get one last letter to the wife he hasn't seen in many years. Directly due to her involvement in the ludic quest, Oedipa comes to this man and embraces him: "Exhausted, hardly knowing what she was doing, she came the last three steps and sat, took the man in her arms, actually held him, gazing out of her smudged eyes down the stairs, back into the morning" (p. 93). *Caritas* is a virtue Oedipa learns through play. The power of endowing a separate world in the mind renders postlapsarian man a new Adam in the promised land of the self-created Eden and concomitantly it renders him more fully a

human being.

The alternate communication system of W.A.S.T.E. signifies the viability of verbal play to effect an independent world of mind, and even to posit the possibility of an anarchist miracle. The W.A.S.T.E. system is a small, important voice against the oppression of the exploitive weapons factory at Yoyodyne, against the requisite sameness of "individuals in alienating jobs, and in addition, a protest against the nugatory illusions of the failed American dream. Oedipa finds herself haunted by the intuition that "there were revelations in progress all around her" (p. 28). Her feeling relates directly to the symbol of the muted postal horn and its explicit potential -- "*Shall I project a world?*" (pp. 59, 63). The concept of projecting a world contains the essence of the ludic experience of contemporary fiction and outlines the basic quest which Oedipa forges. As she probes into the silent mysteries of the W.A.S.T.E. network, she comes upon the proposition of a new American Eden, an epistemological paradise where the mind proposes the changed relationship with the universe, Emerson's vision as the game of words:

Last night, she might have wondered what undergrounds apart from the couple she knew of communicated by WASTE system. By sunrise she could legitimately ask what undergrounds didn't. If miracles were, as Jesús Arrabal had postulated years ago on the beach at Mazatlán, intrusions into this world from another, a kiss of cosmic pool balls, then

so must be each of the night's post horns. For here were God knew how many citizens, deliberately choosing not to communicate by U.S. Mail. It was not an act of treason, nor possibly even of defiance. But it was a calculated withdrawal, from the life of the Republic, from its machinery. Whatever else was being denied them out of hate, indifference to the power of their vote, loopholes, simple ignorance, this withdrawal was their own, unpublicized, private. Since they could not have withdrawn into a vacuum (could they?), there had to exist the separate, silent, unsuspected world (p. 92).

The words of fiction present man with a concrete chance to alter his relationship with the universe, to create a new society through the revelations of the ludic paradise. Borges tells us that German idealism influenced the transcendentalists, that much of their hope and energy they inherited from Hegel: "Emerson reiterated that there is no being who is not a microcosm, a minuscule universe. The soul of the individual is identified with the soul of the world; physical laws are mingled with moral laws. If God is in every soul, all external authority disappears. All that each man needs is his own profound and secret divinity."²⁶ If Matthiessen argued that Emerson's age "could be called more widely 'the age of Hegel,'"²⁷ it is possible for us to argue that contemporary fiction in the age of Nabokov and Pynchon is no less strongly influenced by the concepts of idealism. Man has only

²⁶ Jorge Luis Borges, *An Introduction to American Literature* (New York: Schocken, 1973), p. 25.

²⁷ F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 54.

words to play with and through the aesthetic consciousness he can actively transform his mind, and hence in the Hegelian sense, he can remake the world by means of a revolution in thought. When Pynchon unifies the notion of a new America with the power of mind, he echoes Whitman, who "declared that 'only Hegel is fit for America,' since in his system 'the human soul stands in the centre, and all the universes minister to it.'"²⁸ Once men have played in the verbal garden, they have tasted the freedom of a new consciousness, where, as Schiller indicates, they are "free alike of the compulsion to infringe the freedom of others in order to assert their own."²⁹ Through his mind, man controls the universe. No longer in the aesthetic state will the coercion of the workaday world compel men to live in poverty and alienation:

In the midst of the fearful kingdom of forces, and in the midst of the sacred kingdom of laws, the aesthetic impulse to form is at work, unnoticed, on the building of a third joyous kingdom of play and of semblance, in which man is relieved of the shackles of circumstance, and released from all that might be called constraint, alike in the physical and in the moral sphere.

If in the dynamic State of rights it is as force that one man encounters another, and imposes limits upon his activities; if in the ethical State of duties Man sets himself over against man with all the majesty of the law, and puts a curb upon his desires: in those circles where conduct is governed by beauty, in the aesthetic

28 *Ibid.*, p. 525.

29 Schiller, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

State, none may appear to the other except as form, or confront him except as an object of free play. To bestow freedom by means of freedom is the fundamental law of this kingdom.

The dynamic State can merely make society possible, by letting one nature be curbed by another; the ethical State can merely make it (morally) necessary, by subjecting the individual will to the general; the aesthetic State alone can make it real, because it consummates the will of the whole through the nature of the individual.³⁰

It is the image of play, of the ludic dream, which motivates Oedipa to transcend the wasteland of contemporary America. She sees the dying sailor, the poor people who trade in their cars as if the pieces of metal are the last vestiges of their hope for America and for themselves. She witnesses the disaffected and alienated workers from the Yoyodyne weapons factory. She watches her husband go crazy and is held hostage by her psychiatrist. She laments Driblette's suicidal walk into the sea. It is for all the forgotten and disaffected that her quest proceeds, and in this sense she is radically different from the protagonists of the other fictions in this study. Against the self-absorption of Humbert and Waugh, Oedipa stands poignantly united with the *angst* of her world, of the people outside her suburban home. She, even more than Mucho, knows the torments of the entropic vision and shares his metonymic survey of the disaffected:

30 Schiller, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

Yet at least he had believed in the cars. Maybe to excess: how could he not, seeing people poorer than him come in, Negro, Mexican, cracker, a parade seven days a week, bringing the most godawful of trade-ins: motorized metal extensions of themselves, of their families and what their whole lives must be like, out there so naked for anybody, a stranger like himself, to look at, frame cockeyed, rusty underneath, fender repainted in a shade just off enough to depress the value, if not Mucho himself, inside smelling hopelessly of children, supermarket booze, two, sometimes three generations of cigarette smokers, or only of dust -- and when the cars were swept out you had to look at the actual residue of these lives, and there was no way of telling what things had been truly refused (when so little he supposed came by that out of fear most of it had to be taken and kept) and what had simply (perhaps tragically) been lost: clipped coupons promising savings of 5 or 10¢, trading stamps, pink flyers advertising specials at the markets, butts, tooth-shy combs, help-wanted ads, Yellow Pages torn from the phone book, rags of old underwear or dresses that already were period costumes, for wiping your own breath off the inside of a windshield with so you could see whatever it was, a movie, a woman or car you coveted, a cop who might pull you over just for drill, all the bits and pieces coated uniformly, like a salad of despair, in a gray dressing of condensed exhaust, dust, body wastes -- it made him sick to look, but he had to look (pp. 4-5).

Oedipa is searching for a brave new world, though her experience is without the ebullience of Miranda's. Yet the journey she forges, that Pierce forces her to engage in, brings her to the invention of a new American Eden, as glorious as Miranda's island paradise. This Eden is the word and the revolutionary consciousness it confers. Oedipa finds freedom, "As if there could be no barriers between herself and the rest of the land" (p. 133).

She finds a unity; now there is nothing alien to the self; "There was the true continuity, San Narciso had no boundaries. No one knew yet how to draw them. She had dedicated herself, weeks ago, to making sense of what Inverarity had left behind, never suspecting that the legacy was America " (p. 134). If Oedipa attains freedom and harmony by inventing America through the play of the mind in art, through the aesthetic state, she follows the gaming pattern of those revolutionaries in the W.A.S.T.E. system, those who, like her, rebel against the compulsion of capitalist society. Pynchon argues for an aesthetic state no less than Schiller. The Eden of art is that condition in which "Beauty alone makes the whole world happy, and each and every being forgets its limitations while under its spell". Moreover, "no privilege, no autocracy of any kind, is tolerated where taste rules, and the realm of aesthetic semblance extends its sway ... Here, therefore, in the realm of Aesthetic Semblance, we find that ideal of equality fulfilled ..." ³¹ Mike Fallopian articulates the importance of the creative impulse as an assertion of freedom in society:

"Sure this Koteks is part of some underground," he told her a few days later, "an underground of the unbalanced, possibly, but then how can you blame them for being maybe a little bitter? Look what's happening

31 Schiller, *op. cit.*, pp. 217-9.

to them. In school they got brainwashed, like all of us, into believing the Myth of the American Inventor -- Morse and his telegraph, Bell and his telephone, Edison and his light bulb, Tom Swift and his this or that. Only one man per invention. Then when they grew up they found they had to sign over all their rights to a monster like Yoyodyne; got stuck on some 'project' or 'task force' or 'team' and started being ground into anonymity. Nobody wanted them to invent -- only perform their little role in a design ritual, already set down for them in some procedures handbook ..."

Metzger, who'd come along to The Scope that evening, wanted to argue. "You're so right-wing you're left-wing," he protested. "How can you be against a corporation that wants a worker to waive his patent rights. That sounds like the surplus value theory to me, fella, and you sound like a Marxist." As they got drunker this typical Southern California dialogue degenerated further. Oedipa sat alone and gloomy. She'd decided to come tonight to The Scope not only because of the encounter with Stanley Koteks, but also because of other revelations ... (pp. 63-4).

Although Pynchon's irony belies the zealous potential of this passage, particularly when the narrator calls the exchange between Fallopian and Metzger "this typical Southern California dialogue," both a cogency and a seriousness emerge. One cannot fail to recognize the urgency of the rhetoric when viewed in the context of the entire novel. The projection of the ludic realm is thus in many ways a response to the defects of contemporary society and its inevitable alienation. As Schiller and Hegel adumbrate, the rational conclusion to the contradictory protest of Adamic literature brings the potential of a changed man

back into the promise of a changed society wherein the individual is his own agent, as Hegel describes he must be.³² Finally, it is not the gods or the magus who is the ultimate creator; it is man. As Oedipa awaits the crying of lot 49, she is bathed in sunlight; the "puppet-master" auctioneer only looks and smiles on her. Pynchon does not reveal any solutions to his puzzle beyond the mind of the protagonist. The gifted hands of the magus become our own. Hence if we create the world in which we live, then in a very real sense verbal play yields the whole world into our hands.

32 G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, Volume I, p. 226.

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